# COMICS FEATURE™

## HEROES

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WARLOCK ★ DRACULA ★ VENUS

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# COMICS FEATURE SPECIAL COLLECTORS EDITION NUMBER ²
# HERO HISTORIES

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By James Van Hise

## Flash
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## X-Men
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## Thor
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# HEROES

by James Van Hise

## THE FANTASTIC FOUR

If Superman revolutionized comic books in 1938, then the **Fantastic Four** changed the face of comics in the Sixties. It was the flagship book of the then new Marvel line of superhero comics.

Although on the surface the origin of the Fantastic Four seems quite simple, it has become shrouded over the years in claims and counter-claims. None were cleared up by Stan Lee's 1974 book, **Origins of Marvel Comics**, in which Lee claimed to have single handedly created all of Marvel's most famous characters and then turned them over to someone such as Jack Kirby to draw as though he were a secondary cog in the creative machine.

Jack Kirby drew the first 102 issues of the magazine (as well as several annuals) and to this day his stamp of creativity remains on the book, not like a ghost haunting every panel but rather as a spirit infusing it with life. When Kirby left the book it was his approach that was imitated time and again, but the closest anyone could come was to recycle characters and villains that Kirby created during his long tenure on the series.

That Kirby was increasingly unhappy over the years with the way his efforts were acknowledged was a behind-the-scenes fact of life which did not come to light until he shocked Fandom by leaving Marvel for DC in 1970. Kirby at DC? Marvel without Jack Kirby? It was an impossible concept when you consider that in the early to mid-Sixties Kirby drew almost every single Marvel superhero comic series going during that time, including Sgt. Fury but excluding Spider-Man. This is when the chinks in Marvel's creative history first began to come to light.

In **The Rocket's Blast Comicollector #81,** an early comics fanzine, Jack Kirby was interviewed by Bruce Hamilton about why he switched to DC. "At DC I'm given the privilege of being associated with my own ideas. If I did come up with an idea at Marvel, they'd take it away from me and I lost all association with it. I was never given credit for the writing which I did. Most of the writing at Marvel is done by the artist from the script."

Regarding the **Fantastic Four** in particular Kirby went on to say, "It was my idea. It was my idea to do it the way it was; my idea to develop it the way it was. I'm not saying that Stan had nothing to do with it. Of course he did. We talked things out. As things went on, I began to work at home and I no longer came up to the office. I developed all the stuff at home and just sent it in. I had to come up with new ideas to help the strip sell. I was faced with the frustration of having to come up with new ideas and then having them taken from me."

In **Origins of Marvel Comics,** Stan Lee described the genesis of the book with Kirby waiting in the wings to accept the book as a **fait accompli** after all the really creative work was finished. Lee described a meeting with Martin Goodman wherein Goodman suggested that a superhero team book would be a good idea since DC's **Justice League of America** was selling very well. Lee also wanted to do a comic book such as he himself would like to read, one where the characters would not have secret identities and would also have genuine human emotions. The closest Lee comes to giving Kirby any creative credit is when he says, "After kicking it around with Martin and Jack for awhile I decided to call our quaint quartet The Fantastic Four. I wrote a detailed first synopsis for Jack to follow, and the rest is history." Of his working relationship with Kirby, Lee explained, "I had only to give Jack an outline of a story and he would draw the entire strip, breaking down the outline into exactly the right number of panels replete with action and drama. Then it remained for me to take Jack's artwork and add the captions and dialogue." This is not as simple as it sounds.

A comic book plot is generally a simple outline written on a couple sheets of paper, and when an artist and writer have been working together for any length of time at all it can be nothing more than a phone call. This is the Marvel style of writing. The artist is left to break the story down, establish how the conflict looks and add his own flourishes. In order to do this coherently the artist must write notes on the border of the page of art next to each panel describing the progression of the story. This often includes the dialogue so that the writer winds up just putting it in his own words. Whether the artist gets a co-author credit remains to be seen. In the case of Lee and Kirby this progressed to the point that Kirby was literally writing each book he drew and Lee just did the captions and dialogue at the end while still taking a full writing credit. This caused some unforeseen problems for Kirby later as other writers looked forward to working with Kirby and getting the same kind of sweetheart deal in which Kirby did the lion's share of the writing.

That Lee had an important input cannot be disputed, even if it was in rewriting Kirby's own captions and dialogue into a perhaps more dramatically satisfying form. This can be seen when comparing the Lee/Kirby comics with Kirby's solo books at DC. The visuals had the same impact but the writing style was missing something, then and now. His strengths clearly lie in creating and plotting. In **Silver Star #1**, a 1983 comic from Pacific Comics, one of Kirby's lines of dialogue reads, "Hey!

Come on, mister big! Don't rattle your gonads in **my** ears!" How picturesque, not to mention incongrous in the context.

While in more recent years Jack Kirby has been reluctant to discuss his early years at Marvel, in **The Spirit #39** ("Kitchen Sink", February '83) Kirby once more dwells on his early creative years at Marvel in an interview conducted by Will Eisner. He describes his returning to Atlas in the late Fifties on a dark day when the company was contemplating going out of business, and that he urged Stan Lee to hold it together because he had some ideas he wanted to institute about bringing back superheroes which were on the wane at the time. Lee supposedly gave Kirby's ideas credence because Kirby hadbeen a mover and shaker at Timely [which became Atlas which became Marvel] in the early Forties. Kirby is, after all, the co-creator of Captain America along with Joe Simon. What the interview fails to explore is why Kirby's ideas [which included Spider-Man] were not instituted until several years of monster books had foraged the newsstands under the Atlas imprint, books in which Kirby was the mainstay.

While there is no doubt that Kirby was a prime force in the creation of the Fantastic Four and perhaps the main force behind its most memorable issues, Stan Lee was an important force as well, although not quite the pivotal voice of creation he makes himself out to be in **Origins of Marvel Comics.**

Those early issues of **Fantastic Four** show the raw creative energies at work, as well as not quite as much analysis as goes into a story today. Their origin consists of Reed Richards stealing a rocket which he'd overseen the construction of so that they can "beat the Commies into space." He needs Ben Grimm as a pilot but Sue comes along because of that "where you go I do" chestnut and her kid brother Johnny Storm accompanies them for the same reason. How scientific. For some reason the ship isn't shielded against cosmic rays and their exposure to them changes the foursome. Upon crash landing they each find they've been transformed. In one of the sillier moments of this scene, when Ben Grimm changes into an orange-skinned behemoth, he becomes so angry that he grabs a tree and breaks it off in his hands. But why would he have had any inkling he could even do this? It's not exactly your average reflex reaction. The only reason all this wonderful hokum works when you read it is because it happens quickly [unlike the wordy, overwritten panels in Marvel Comics today]. The artwork by Kirby is strangely atmospheric, certainly much different even than the monster books he'd been drawing at the time and different from the way his work would change over the years. It has a very menacing air about it. They were certainly not trying to imitate a DC comic.

The second issue of FF introduced the Skrulls from outer space in a plotline which was picked up in a later Fantastic Four Annual. Issue four revived the Sub-Mariner, a popular character in Timely Comics of the Forties. But issue #5 introduced their quintessential nemesis—Doctor Doom. There was a furious imagination at work in those early issues as that single issue not only introduced Dr. Doom, gave a capsule origin, but also had the Fantastic Four forced to undertake a mission back in time—and it was all perfectly balanced. There was an art then in telling a story in a single issue, and leaving the reader satisfied. It had tension, suspense and a fast-paced plot. In issue #6 Dr. Doom returned in a team-up with the Sub-Mariner. Namor returned in #9 and Dr. Doom returned in #10, and yet you enjoyed how these return engagements were handled. There was a freshness about them rather than having them seem as if they just didn't have any better ideas. The people producing these comics actually seemed to like what they were doing, and on a monthly basis. You could tell that they looked forward to writing and drawing the next issue as much as we looked forward to reading it.

One of the nagging secrets in the F.F. over the years is what Dr. Doom looks like under his mask. While Darth Vader's true appearance was revealed in **Return of the Jedi,** Dr. Doom's true likeness will doubtless remain shrouded in mystery, at least within the pages of the comic. Jack Kirby has always been free with the facts about the good Doctor. "Dr. Doom was a perfectionist. Dr. Doom was a handsome guy and he had to hide his face in a steel mask because he had a scratch on his face. He couldn't stand that scratch." One wonders if he never heard of plastic surgery. At a convention some years ago, Jack Kirby did a drawing of Doom without his mask and it was indeed a man with a small scratch on his cheek. Some fans believed that Doom bore an uncanny likeness to Stan Lee but Kirby denied any such intent towards resemblance.

Those first few years of the F.F. featured a creative explosion incomparable in any other comic book title. The first 67 issues saw the birth of such characters as the Skrulls, Dr. Doom, Puppet Master, The Watcher, the Red Ghost and his super apes, the Mad Thinker, Dragon Man, Diablo, the Inhumans, the Black Panther, Galactus, the Silver Surfer, Klaw, the Frightful Four and the strange being Him [who under other hands became known as Warlock. Then the torrent ceased. One could sense an unseen hand turning off the flow. After issue 67 no new major characters were created. It just

became a revolving cycle of appearances by old characters such as Dr. Doom, Galactus, the Silver Surfer and yet another Thing-on-the-rampage story. Kirby was holding back and it was clearly evident that this was so. He was obviously tired of creating something and not only watching Stan Lee take the bows but seeing Marvel absorb the character into their widening stable of successful Jack Kirby creations. So Kirby put on the brakes, did good work, but did not give the book that extra creative juice which had boosted it to popularity over the years, and the most telling aspect of all this is that Stan Lee was unable to pick up that slack or infuse the book with new major characters of his own. 'Nuff said.

When Kirby left the book the word came down that the F.F. must still have the Kirby look. The problem was that in imitating the art they neglected to imitate the necessary creativity,if such is even possible. So the years went by with a round robin of writers and artists doing pretty much what Kirby himself had done during his last three years on the title. There were glimmers of interest over the years but under the almost constant inks of Joe Sinnott (who did such a wonderful job inking Kirby), all the art looked the same and any character which might have been brought to the book by a different penciller was submerged under Sinnott's inks. Even when George Perez (who's work on DC's **Teen Titans** book has made him one of the most popular artists in comics today) drew the F.F. back around '77, Sinnott did not ink to bring out Perez's strengths in drawing but rather to make it look like Joe Sinnott art, including having the male characters constantly gnashing their teeth (i.e. **F.F. #186,** page 6, panel 7, as well as many others in the same issue). The stuff had not only begun to look alike long before this, it did look alike. Even distinctly non-Kirby stylists like Bill Sienkiewicz had their art transformed into ersatz Kirby under the inks of Joe Sinnott.

Then came **F.F. #232.**

John Byrne, who as a child discovered the F.F. with their pivotal issue #5, became disenchanted with his working relationship with Chris Claremont on the **X-Men** and decided to look elsewhere for a book where he could stretch creatively. What he settled on was the F.F., which is still Marvel's flagship title. Byrne had previously drawn the F.F. a couple of years prior to this latest stint on it but he was not satisfied with the stories or his art. Once again those earlier issues had been inked by Joe Sinnott and that special **frission** found in Byrne's art was nowhere to be seen.

This time Byrne approached F.F. with a much stronger idea of what he wanted to do and this was heavily influenced by the **feelings** he had carried away from those early Lee/Kirby issues. His goal was to not only infuse the book with the same sort of energetic atmosphere of those early years, but to once more bring change and growth to the title, something which had been absent. The F.F. had long been a victim of recurring plot twiches such as losing their powers only to regain them one way or another a couple issues later. This has been done so often that whenever it reappears it's, "Oh, no, not this plot again!" Byrne has been very successful at capturing the feel of excitement of those early years although he has fallen victim to the Galactus syndrome. Another cliche has been to return Galactus, who must absorb the energies of Earth to live, only to have him bamboozled into leaving at the end of the story. He marked time with yet another one of those. Ho hum. Galactus, like most cosmic characters, became dull quickly because what can you do with him which hasn't already been done except to kill him?

One of the best of these earlier stories was "Terror in a Tiny Town" in #236 an amazingly effective story whose plot was borrowed uncredited from the Frederik Pohl science fiction story "Tunnel Under the World."

Byrne's writing on this title has been remarkably good considering he had little previously credited (outside of co-plotting the **X-Men**), other than **Marvel Two-In-One #50**, a sad attempt at scripting a nostalgic Sixties-style story which took a terrific idea and squandered it by having a silly ten-page fight scene in a 17-page story.

The only other problem with these Byrne issues is that he just doesn't know how to ink his own work for reproduction on the shoddy paper on which most comics are printed. Terry Austin may take some liberties when inking Byrne's pencils, but when Byrne inks them the result looks like much of the linework blotted during printing. Byrne would do better saving his inking for when his work will appear on whiter paper.

Some previous writers of the F.F. such as Len Wein and Marv Wolfman, have complained that Byrne is making too many sweeping changes by doing things such as summarily transporting the Great Refuge of the Inhumans to the blue area of the Moon. This is the whole point. The comic has been stagnant and predictable for a decade and Byrne is striving to change this, and succeeding. I've been reading the F.F. since #13 and I like what I see these days. When a comic has dubbed itself "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine!" as long as this one has, it's about time that it did something to earn it rather than resting on the laurels of what Jack Kirby did almost fifteen years ago.

# HEROES

James Van Hise

Before Marvel revolutionized comics in the Sixties with the introduction of the **Fantastic Four** and other new and different super-hero books, a small and more sedate, yet just as meaningful, revolution had been slowly taking place at DC Comics.

The Silver Age of comics [which includes what Marvel accomplished in the Sixties], actually began in 1956 with **Showcase #4** [September-October], and the tentative revival of The Flash, the fastest man alive.

The Golden Age of comics had only sputtered out a few years before with the final issue of **All-Star Comics #57** [February-March 1951]. Thereafter it was called **All Star Western** and was an entirely different magazine. So even though DC still had their mainstays in Superman and Batman [as well as their spinoff magazines], super-heroes just weren't very strong in the early Fifties. These were the years when horror ruled the newstands and even Batman and Superman fought science fiction monsters. During those first five years of the Fifties there were sometimes as many as 500 titles in existence. Crime and Horror ruled the purchasing habits of the comics fans.

But then came the fall. Fly-by-night publishers went out of business overnight, and even the established companies such as EC Comics found it a tough row to hoe. With the exaggerated backlash against horror comics [most of which were dull and not well done anyway], and the introduction of the Comics Code Authority, the good horror comics, like EC, collapsed along with the bad. When the dust settled it was a very different marketplace.

The passage of time alone would have meant that the turnover in readership had begun, even without the upheaval in the marketplace. While DC had never really been a part of the horror trend [the closest they came, in the form of a **Phantom Stranger** comic, lasted only six issues from 52-53], they hadn't really tried to buck it overmuch. Superheroes were on the decline in the early Fifties so they produced various adventure books, westerns, and the rather tame **House of Mystery** and **Strange Adventures.** But now the time seemed right to try something else.

**Showcase** had only just begun by featuring contemporary adventure strips like **Firefighters** and **The Frogmen**, none of which excited sales enough to appear in more than one issue.

"Then someone, some unknown inspirational genius, suggested that we bring back the Flash," recalled Julius Schwartz, editor of the book. "We decided not to revive the old Flash from the 40s but to modernize him. We got the idea of a new origin, a new costume and a hero who got his inspiration, strangely enough, from reading an old **Flash** comic!" In his origin story, Barry Allen is reading an old **Flash** comic book seconds before a lightning bolt from a raging electrical storm strikes the cabinet in his laboratory and smashes certain chemicals, bathing him in them. The result is the acquisition of superspeed.

Bob Kanigher, one of the writers of the Forties version of The Flash, created some of the personality quirks that helped personify Barry Allen, such as his inevitable lateness in his civilian identity.

Another veteran of the original Golden Age Flash was Carmine Infantino, the artist whose individual style would stamp the strip with its identity throughout the early years of the character's revival and remain as a fond memory until he would at last return to the strip years later.

"Julie called me in one day," Carmine recalled, "and said that we were going to try super-heroes again. We were going to redo the Flash. Kanigher would write it, I would do the pencils and Joe Kubert would ink it. I wasn't thrilled—I never liked doing the super-heroes stuff. But I said Okay and we did it."

And yet Infantino's work showed a real flair for the character, from his design of the new costume down to all of the background details. His work had come a long way from the comparitively crude art he did in the Forties to the highly stylized art style he was still developing even as he began work on the most popular series he would ever draw.

Abandoning the silly idea of a character who wore a helmet which looked like a hubcap with wings, the new Flash was sleek and graceful in design, emphasizing his swift power even when he was standing still.

In creating the character, the name of Barry Allen was taken as a combination of Steve Allen (who was very popular on television at that time) and from a local New York TV personality named Barry Gray.

The origin story, written by Robert Kanigher, has some interesting touches which were pretty much ignored in later stories. These are that The Flash can see things like a bullet moving through the air, but to him they seem to be in slow motion (This creates a paradox because then normal motion would appear extraordinarily slow to him, but that concept is never dealt with). Unfortunately, the villain used in the origin tale is called the Turtle Man, the slowest man on Earth. He's just an ordinary crook who speaks with pauses in between each word and tricks The Flash a couple times, but otherwise he's just a silly little gimmick of a character.

The second story in **Showcase #4** was written by John Broome and is much more the type of story to which Flash readers would become accustomed as it involves a criminal from the future who is accidentally exiled into our time. He also possesses super speed and is using it to steal items to repair the vessel which brought him here so that he can return to the future and exact revenge. It's a pretty good story although it does possess a rather unsophisticated representation of the time barrier as being something akin to a stone wall which The Flash has to break through. This time barrier also supposedly only exists in moving toward the future, not into the past. Otherwise it's a fine early effort, especially when they were consciously trying for a more modern style of super-hero story of the type which would become commonplace in the Sixties and Seventies but which was still aborning in 1956.

The artwork in the whole issue was drawn by Carmine Infantino and inked by Joe Kubert. Schwartz wouldn't let Infantino ink his own work because he felt the style was then too wild and he didn't like it. Only on Detective Chimp stories and later in **Strange Adventures** on the "Space Museum" stories was Infantino allowed to ink his own work at DC Comics. The inking by Kubert was good but tended to make the linework more Kubert's than Infantino's by the time it was finished.

Sales reports take time to come in, but when it became clear that the sales were up for **Showcase #4**, The Flash was slotted into #8, which would appear eight months after his initial tryout. His second appearance introduced Capt. Cold, who would be the first in a long line of recurring foes. Leonard Snart's power, like many of The Flash's villainous foes is through a super-scientific ability, in this case a sub-zero, high-pressue cold gun capable of creating all manner of icy effects. Capt. Cold made further appearances in issue numbers 114, 129, 134, 140, 150, 155, 166, 174 (Infantino's last issue in his first run as Flash artist), 193, 226 and more. When Infantino returned to The Flash in 1981, Capt. Cold was in the second issue he drew, #297.

Many of The Flash's villains are unusual, but Al Desmond, alias Mr. Element, was something else again. Fascinated by elements, he used them to aid him in committing crimes until the Flash outfoxed him, but he was not so easily beaten. In **Showcase #14** he returned as Dr. Alchemy as he had found the fabled

SECONDS LATER, HE IS STREAKING ACROSS THE HARBOR WATERS IN THE WAKE OF A FAST-MOVING SURFBOARD...
THERE HE IS NOW! HE ROBBED THAT YACHT AND IS CARRYING OFF HIS LOOT IN A BIG DITTY BAG!

Philosopher's Stone which enabled him to turn anything to gold. It makes one wonder why he bothered going back to robbing banks. Desmond, like the later villain the Heat Wave, repented his actions and tried to go straight, but things kept going wrong. In #147 he was forced to return to active duty by the mind control of the Reverse Flash (who was accidentally killed by The Flash quite recently in #324), in order to purify an element which would restore his super-speed powers. Mr. Element also appeared in numbers 153 and 216 while Dr. Alchemy donned his robes in #230.

The Flash was gifted with his own magazine at about X-mas 1959, several months after **Showcase #14** appeared. **Flash #105** (February-March 1959) continued the numbering of the original **Flash Comics,** picking up exactly ten years after #104 appeared. The main reason it continued the old numbering was for the purpose of second class mailing requirements which otherwise required the posting of a bond when a new title is granted these privileges. William Gaines did this in the early Fifties when he changed the title of a magazine but retained the same numbering to make things easier on himself, but sometimes he was caught. In DC's case they had no trouble since they were just continuing an old title now updated, although the character was only superficially the same.

**Flash #105** had another John Broome SF tale involving Flash confronting an alien being, only this one was from our distant past. The back-up story introduced Samuel Scudder, the Mirror Master, another villain who employed super-scientific devices to bedevil the scarlet speedster. But unlike Capt. Cold, the Mirror Master could accomplish much more with his devices, and eventually even learned of a "mirror

world" he could escape to safety in. But he became bored there and longed for the challenge of combat with his nemesis The Flash. His other initial appearances were in numbers 109, 119 [an especially good one, inked by Murphy Anderson], 126, 130, 136, 146, 155, 161, 174, 188, 206, 219, and 231.

**Flash #106** did something unusual. It began a trilogy of stories featuring Grodd, the super gorilla. A rogue intellect of the secret Gorilla City located somewhere in Africa, Grodd is determined to use his superior mind to control all other living creatures. In three seperate adventures in numbers 106-108, Flash defeats three remarkable schemes in stories which bristle with John Broome's science fiction wizardry, ably abetted by the imaginative manifestations of Carmine Infantino and Joe Giella. In later years Giella's inks would become looser and less refined, but in these early years his work and Infantino's were at the top of their form. When it came to super-scientific devices, Infantino was to DC what Jack Kirby was to Marvel.

The most popular team in comics in the early Sixties was DC's pairing of penciller Carmine Infantino with inker Murphy Anderson [although Anderson was also a superb penciller and inker in his own right as evidenced by his popular Capt. Comet series in the Fifties **Strange Adventures** and The Atomic Knights which appeared in the early Sixties in that same title]. Infantino and Anderson did the majority of their most famous work together on the Adam Strange series in **Mystery In Space**. But occasionally during the time he'd ink a story for **The Flash**, although most of these appeared in the title during 1960 and 61. As nice as Infantino's art was under other inkers, Anderson added a smooth elegance which enhanced the super-realism of Infantino's pencils. Infantino did his best work on science fiction and The Flash was a super-hero strip which dripped with science fiction accoutrements at every opportunity.

**Flash #110** introduced Kid Flash, who until #135 looked like just a miniature Flash because his costume was identical. Wally West, Iris West's young nephew, is introduced to Barry Allen who arranges for Wally to meet The Flash. In the coincidence to end them all, just as Flash is explaining the strange circumstances which gave him his powers, a lightning bolt crashes through the window, hits a cabinet of chemicals behind Wally and bathes him in certain ones. As the Flash thought at the time, "It

seems Fantastic!", and he was right. Kid Flash was used to better effect than one might imagine in some book length adventures in issues 120, 125 and 135 as well as later stories. His solo adventures in numbers 111, 114 and 116 were very low key in comparison to Flash stories and weren't at all satisfying. The character of Kid Flash seen now in **The Teen Titans** has come a long way since the 1960 issue of **The Flash**, and if we're to believe how comics reckon time, he's only aged six years. We all should be so lucky.

Elliot S. Maggin once said that DC tends to take themselves much more seriously than Marvel does, and yet DC has a history of producing some of the silliest covers on comics. If it isn't The Trickster escaping Flash on a tricycle on the cover of #142, then it's something like that oft-cited classic #115, "The Day Flash Weighed 1,000 Pounds!" The cover is silly enough but the splash page is a real howler. We see the Flash, weighing only slightly less than the Goodyear blimp, facing down a man who holds a strange device. "If you think you're fat now, Flash—watch what this gimmick does to you next! It'll blow you up so much, you'll explode!" To which the Flash fearlessly replies, "You'll never get the chance, Dawson —not with this hat pin weapon of mine!" It's really hard getting people to take comics seriously when they see something like this. It just confirms all their worst suspicions.

Oddly enough, the story by John Broome is very good, and would have been even better if the fatso gimmick hadn't been tossed in. Believe-it-or-else, this is a Gorilla Grodd story. In his inescapable prison in Gorilla City, Grodd has faced the fact that he can not escape. So devising a pill from the chemical elements in the earth at his feet, he takes it, knowing that it will kill him but will also transmit his mind into that of another living being. There is a chance that it might be a lower form of life in whose body he'd be helpless, but he takes the risk...and winds up in the body of one William Dawson, a transient just arrived in Central City, hometown of The Flash. Dawson turns a weapon on Flash which draws moisture from the air around him and increases his weight dramatically. Dawson uses the last of his Grodd super mental powers to wipe The Flash's memory away, but he regains it later and enters the dehydrating room at an instant potato factory to lose his excess weight. The secret behind the splash page is that this works and when The Flash faces Dawson he pretends to still be grotesquely fat by having pumped his uniform full of air, which is released by the hatpin.

Some of the people who were reading and appreciating **Flash** during these early, wild days, and who had letters printed in the lettercol, **Flash-Grams,** include one Roy Thomas [in numbers 116 and 120] and Tom Batiuk of **Funky Winkerbean** fame in #121.

One of the real treats for Flash fans in those early days was **Flash Annual #1** published in the Summer of 1963. It helped awaken the incipient collector in me by printing a complete index to the new Flash on the inside back cover which listed all the showcase issues and gave titles, art and story credits for numbers 105-140. It presented a tangible goal to pursue, as well as what was, at that time, rare behind-the-scenes information.

There was more testing and experimentation going on in **The Flash** from 1959-1963 than in any other DC hero title like this. We saw the introduction of Kid Flash, Elongated Man [in #112, April-May 1960], and in #123, "Flash of Two Worlds," which ushered in the gradual revival of all of DC's Golden Age regulars. The two Flashes reteamed periodically thereafter, most notably in numbers 129 and 137 [the latter actually featuring the Justice Society of America in a small supporting role]. The Flash even began doing crossovers with our Green Lantern, #131 being the first to transpire in **The Flash** magazine.

The Earth-Two stories, involving the alternate world super-heroes such as

LIFE RETURNS TO NORMAL FOR POLICE SCIENTIST BARRY ALLEN. FOR THE REST OF THE DAY HE BUSIES HIMSELF WITH OFFICIAL TASKS--THEN WORKS OVERTIME ON A PERSONAL MATTER...
AS BARRY ALLEN, I'LL GIVE THE FLASH A HELPING HAND BY PREPARING SOME SPECIAL GIMMICK OF MY OWN TO NEUTRALIZE THOSE HE'S DEVISED TO STOP ME!

the Golden Age Flash, were written in the beginning by Gardner Fox. One of his best was #137, the book length story "Vengeance of the Immortal Villain," which introduced us to Vandal Savage, a character who continues to provide fascination for readers today, twenty years after he was reintroduced. Note his unusual appearance on Earth One in Marv Wolfman's Superman stories recently.

But issue #139 presented the character who would change Flash's life, more than once—Professor Zoom, the Reverse Flash. When a capsule is projected into the future containing items from our era, including an old uniform used by The Flash, a criminal uses 25th century technology to amplify the superspeed wave patterns left over in the uniform so that when he dons it he acquires the powers of The Flash. The real Flash destroys this property of the uniform later but Professor Zoom continues to escape and regain his powers in one way or another. In **Flash #275** he murders Iris West and Flash later maroons him in a strange, hostile dimension. But Zoom escapes and in #323 and #324 they have their ultimate super-speed confrontation.

**The Flash** has had more than his share of problems over the years. In #167 some strange Woody Allen-like imp named Mopee claimed that he was actually responsible for giving The Flash his powers in a story called, "The Real Origin of The Flash," and we were led to believe that this was no joke! How could one give any serious consideration to The Flash after this? Who could get excited reading the adventures of a character who got his powers from Woody Allen? But thankfully, story developments in **Justice League of America #59** supported Flash's origin as told in **Showcase #4** and asically made #167 into some sort

of hoax. I recall at the time it was published in 1969 that many fans considered **Flash #167** to be one of the most insulting comics ever written.

Flash (as Barry Allen) married Iris West in #165 but did not reveal his secret identity to her until #174. But it turned out that she already knew because Barry talks in his sleep! For some reason, DC decided that in #203 they'd reveal that Iris actually came from 1000 years in the future. It seemed like an idea brought in from left field, as though The Flash could not be allowed to marry a normal woman.

Carmine Infantino stopped drawing **The Flash** with issue #174, but even before this his work looked as though he were tiring of the strip. Flash was ballooning into odd proportions and even Murphy Anderson's inking on occasional covers couldn't straighten things out. Sid Greene's inking of Infantino's work at this time just seemed to accentuate his flaws, so that when he did give up the strip his departure was anti-climactic.

But the memories remained. There were fifty or so good issues left to pour over of fine Infantino work, and nostalgia is a powerful intoxicant.

Most of the issues from #175-295 were drawn by Irv Novick, and even though he drew far more issues than Infantino [although Carmine is catching up fast], his work just never succeeded in capturing the grace and artistry inherent in The Flash concept.

There were some issues of note in this period, such as #197 by Gil Kane and #206, which although pencilled by Novick was inked by Murphy Anderson and in some panels captured the atmosphere of those early days. But even with a dynamite cover by Neal Adams on #246 or Flash going crazy over the death of Iris in #276 where he took on the entire Justice League, it just wasn't the same. Carmine Infantino had left comics and gone on to be publisher of DC.

But then something happened. Infantino was replaced after several years in that lofty position and once more he was drawing comics. It took awhile but in 1981 he returned to the Flash. There have been ups and downs but over all it's been a very interesting reunion. Special high points have been #300, where both we and Barry Allen were damn near convinced that he'd hallucinated his existence as The Flash, and #309 which read for all the world like one of John Broome's old Flash stories such as he might have written back in 1961. Cary Bates has done a fine job with the modern Flash, even though some of the continued stories seemed to stretch out a bit longer than necessary, such as The Eradicator saga.

In many ways **The Flash** comic has come full circle, but with the death of Professor Zoom saga set to run for a year from #323, as The Flash is accused of murder and brought before the Justice League, the future of this character seems wide open again.

# HEROES

## the X-MEN

AND NOW, I SHALL NOT BORE YOU WITH LONG SPEECHES, BUT I MUST TELL YOU THIS--YOU ARE EACH MORE THAN MERE HOMO SAPIENS --YOU ARE THE FORERUNNERS OF HOMO SUPERIOR--SUPER-OR MAN! YOU EACH HAVE A PRICE-LESS EXTRA MUTANT POWER TO BE USED FOR THE GOOD OF HUMANITY--
AND YOU MUST STILL KEEP YOUR X-MEN IDENTITIES SECRET FOR THE WORLD OF ORDINARY HUMANS IS NOT YET READY TO ACCEPT YOU-- WHILE MAGNETO AND HIS BAND OF EVIL MUTANTS STILL SEEK TO DESTROY YOU! AND NOW, IT IS TIME FOR ME TO BID YOU FAREWELL--
FAREWELL, JEAN
YES! I HAVE MANY UNFINISHED TASKS WHICH I MUST NOW TURN MY ATTENTION TO! SO, I MUST LEAVE YOU FOR A WHILE! BUT, BEFORE I GO, I SHALL APPOINT ONE OF YOU AS GROUP LEADER, TO ACT IN MY BEHALF TILL I RETURN...

The X-Men
by James Van Hise

He had a group, an idea, a story, but he didn't have a name; at least he didn't have a name which the publisher liked.

When Stan Lee conceived The X-Men, it was because he wanted to create a new super team comprised of characters who were born with their abilities, rather than acquiring them through some far-fetched accident. Taking the biological concept of the mutant, something which shows a variation not found in its parents, Stan had come up with a new direction that he had been looking for. He'd even settled on a title for the book: **The Mutants.** The only problem was that then-publisher Martin Goodman thought it was too obscure a word and that the little kids who bought comic books wouldn't understand what it meant. Lee's arguments that there was a wider audience that he was aiming at while still retaining the interest of the bubblegum brigade, fell on deaf ears. Examining what a mutant was, he defined it has having something extra. A mutant could be considered as being an extraordinary human, or in commercial comic book shorthand, an X-man.

which probably helped it when it first appeared in the summer of '63, although the fact that it appeared on the stands along with **Avengers #1** and the first Fantastic Four annual couldn't have hurt either.

While the first issue was certainly interesting, and the introduction of Magneto [who has been to the X-Men what Dr. Doom has been to the Fantastic Four] made for a great start, what with Kirby's striking costume design, the book just wasn't as different as it seemed. It didn't take too discerning a fan to realize that the characters were offshoots of the F.F. Instead of a flaming character, there was an icy one. There was even a homely, super-strong character who used a lot of slang, as well as a super-intelligent group leader. But fans quickly picked up on something else as well. The X-Men were conceived around late '62, about the time that DC published **My Greatest Adventure #80** which introduced "The Doom Patrol," strange characters [although **not** mutants] who'd been brought together by a mysterious wheelchair-bound genius. The coincidence seemed a little too close, although no more was done or said when DC introduced The Swamp Thing right after Marvel did the Man-Thing. These things happen.

The first eleven issues of **The X-Men** were drawn by Jack Kirby, and other than a nagging reuse of The Brotherhood of Evil Mutants in numbers 4, 5, 6 and 7, they were an interesting run, climaxing in #10 which introduced Ka-Zar and the Savage Land in a rousing adventure which took place all in one issue. Although Kirby did one more issue, almost anything would seem an anti-climax after everything Kirby came up with in #10.

While the title lasted for years after Kirby left it, it seemed to be searching for itself, never certain which direction to go or what to do with the characters as they moved from one adventure to another which usually impacted very little on them as human beings. There were exceptions, though.

Before Stan Lee left the book as writer with #20 [when Roy Thomas replaced him], Prof. X's half-brother Cain Marko [the Juggernaut] was introduced in #12 and #14 brought on The Sentinels, the latter being as closely identified with the X-Men as anything anyone ever did in the series.

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*The X-Men frequently had to battle their counter-parts, the Evil Mutants.*

Beast had been altered so that he was an intelligent, eloquent personality rather than a Ben Grimm clone. Thus the original X-Men included Professor X [who was killed off by Thomas in #42 and brought back by him in #65], Cyclops [who fires powerful optic blasts and is little different today than when he was introduced in 1963 when he was called "Slim" Summers, a nickname that was quickly dropped], Iceman [Bobby Drake, who could ice up his body and whose origin appeared in issues #44-46], the Angel [whose sole power is that of flight due to his wings and whose origin appeared in #14], the Beast [Hank McCoy who underwent a metamorphosis in **Amazing Adventures #11** into a blue-furred character who then went on to become involved with the Avengers and later the Defenders as had both Iceman and The Angel], Marvel Girl [Jean Grey, who died in #100 only to be reborn as Phoenix, whose powers dwarfed those she previously had and who then went out of control as Dark Phoenix].

There were other part-time X-Men such as the Mimic who first fought them in #19, and then reformed to join the group in #27-29 until he lost his power.

Alex Summers [Havok] first turned up in #54 and although he fought alongside the X-Men after learning to control his power, he was never formally a member and turns up only now and then.

The original X-Men had some interesting high points such as numbers 50 and 51 which were drawn by Jim Steranko, but the most memorable issues were at the end of the original run when Roy Thomas scripted and Neal Adams pencilled numbers 56-63 and 65. Tom Palmer inked, and even when Don Heck did #64 as a fill-in issue, it was drawn to imitate Adams so amazingly that you have to look twice at it to see that it's merely a fine imitation. Those last few issues brought the X-Men together in one gripping story after another which balanced character and plot in a manner more familiar with what would be done in the book under Chris Claremont years later. The art is some of Neal Adams most enervating work and he also plotted #65, which formed a moving climax to the run. [These Adams issues were reprinted by Marvel in a special high quality format available only in comic shops]. The run lasted one more issue, but even with the Hulk as a guest star the book seemed dead on its feet after the high energy impact of the Thomas/Adams issues.

Several months later the title was revived as a reprint book, ostensibly to keep the characters active in some form due to undisclosed plans that Marvel had for them.

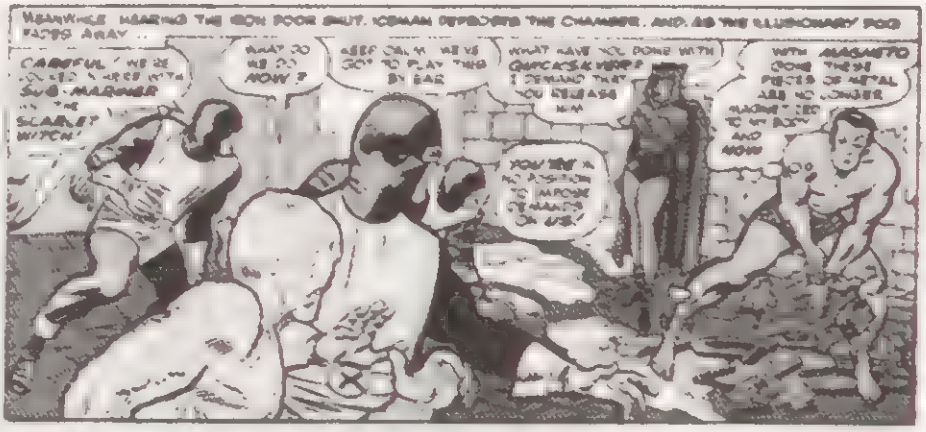
Whatever those plans were, they were kicked around, abandoned and changed until 4½ years later **Giant Size X-Men #1** appeared in 1975

*The Scarlet Witch started out as a member of the Evil Mutants but eventually became a heroine.*

[recently reprinted in a special quality edition available in comic shops].

Marvel had come up with the idea that if they could put together a team composed of characters from many nations, that they'd have a big hit in the overseas market. Roy Thomas suggested the X-Men as an ideal format for this and the team underwent revisions. Although Prof. X was still the ever-present mentor, it was decided to keep Cyclops in order to have some tie between the new X-Men and the old X-Men. It was also felt that he was the most interesting member of the old team due to his tragic overtones in that he could never look at another human being with his unshielded eyes.

The new X-Men were gathered together by Prof. X in **Giant Size #1**. They consisted of Nightcrawler [who can teleport], Wolverine, [a Canadian who was originally part of what would become known as Alpha Flight but who quit to become a free agent when Xavier offered him the chance to employ his heightened senses and adamantium plated skeleton which was



*The Evil Mutants originally thought Namor was a mutant and invited him to join them. But in the end it is discovered that Namor is no mutant and he goes on his way, alone, as ever.*

once referred to as solid admantium until someone pointed out that human bones manufacture the body's blood supply), Storm (an orphan who grew up in the wilds of Kenya, East Africa and who as a child lived as a thief in the streets until maturing into a locally worshipped goddess due to her control of weather), Colossus (aka Peter Rasputin, a Russian who uses his ability to turn his body into something akin to armor plating for international benefit after being convinced by Professor X), Thunderbird (an American Indian, on borrowed time from the start as he was created solely to be killed off in his third outing in **X-Men #95** as his powers and personality were similar to those of Wolverine which would have made him a sort of fifth wheel) and Sprite (also known as Ariel and Kitty Pryde, the newest and youngest X-Man, who, at only fourteen, is possessed of the ability to phase through solid objects much as the Vision of the Avengers can).

Len Wein, who essentially created the new X-Men, was only involved with the title for the first couple stories and then left the book. Chris Claremont was involved with the writing beginning with **X-Men #94**, the second story of the new X-Men.

The artist on the new X-Men up through issue #107 was Dave Cockrum. His approach to the X-Men was quite different from either John Byrne or Paul Smith and his work on the early issues suffers only in comparison to the more slick approach brought to the book later. Len Wein conceived these new X-Men as being teenagers and this is how Cockrum drew them. Claremont later decided their ages should be more varied, but when Cockrum returned to the title for several months beginning with #145, he drew them all like teenagers again which made it all seem very awkward. Whether for this reason or post-Byrne depression, sales slumped until Paul Smith took over the title (a 50,000 copy jump was recorded with his first issue), although Smith left to be replaced by John Romita, Jr.

Chris Claremont began putting the new X-Men through changes almost from the start, but it was when John Byrne began his long stint on the title (#108-143) that the book really came alive as this team meshed the way an artist/writer team should. John Byrne put a lot of his own input into the stories and would become annoyed when something he drew one way would be scripted by Claremont another way later, which led to occasional creative conflicts. It was over this sort of frustration, and a refusal by Claremont to give Byrne equal say in the direction the stories would go, that he finally left the title to be writer/artist on the **Fantastic Four**. Byrne recently took a sort of Canadian version of the X-Men which he'd created in the title, called Alpha Flight, and gave it it's own magazine, which fans have been responding to enthusiastically.

One can only wonder where the book would have gone had Byrne stayed with it as two of his last issues, **X-Men #141-142** contained one of the best stories to ever appear in the title. "Days of Future Past" was a time travel tale involving dual, related stories. The Kitty Pryde of years in the future is able to briefly have her mind sent into her past self in order to warn the X-Men so that they can prevent the murder of a presidential candidate which would ultimately mean the end of the world in the future. While the present day X-Men perform their mission, we see the future from which Kitty Pryde briefly escaped, a future where Sentinels hunt down and capture or destroy any superpowered being, whether mutant or no. One by one we see the murder of all the X-Men we know, those of Storm and Wolverine being the most shocking.

There are many standout stories in the Claremont/Byrne series. Issues #111-116 are especially good, as are the Dark Phoenix stories. This series, which involved Jean Grey's powers warping her and twisting her into the insane Dark Phoenix, climaxed in

#137 when she committed suicide in order to prevent Dark Phoenix from ever rising again. But that's not how Chris Claremont planned it. He'd originally written #137 so that Jean Grey was stripped of her powers forever because Dark Phoenix had destroyed a planet of four billion people. But when editor Jim Shooter saw the pencilled pages he rejected them because even though Claremont's editor, Jim Salicrup, had approved the story, Shooter hadn't seen it until it was drawn. Shooter felt that Phoenix was getting off too lightly and should be imprisoned under eternal torture for her acts, even though she was insane at the time she committed them. Rather than do that, Claremont just had her kill herself with an ancient Kree weapon left on the moon in the blue area. Even this was sabotaged by his disputes with John Byrne because he wanted it to be a weapon in the house of The Watcher which exists in that blue area, but when Byrne drew those pages he didn't like that idea and changed it. By this time, Claremont was so depressed over the entire situation that he just let it go, but Byrne's actions could only have hastened the breakup of the team.

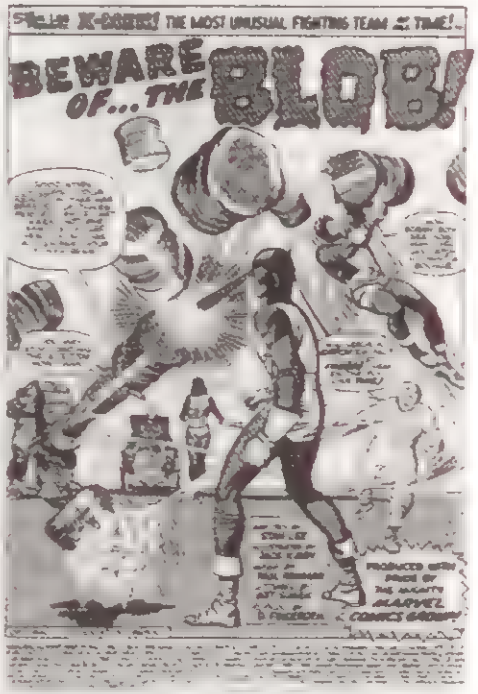
Ever since she died, fans have been wondering if Phoenix will return, and although Shooter claims she's dead, Claremont has been dropping hints in recent stories about a new Phoenix storyline to come. Whether this had anything to do with Paul Smith's departure (over creative differences, just as Byrne's was) is unknown.

Paul Smith's vivid and powerful style has brought just as much verve to the title as Byrne's very different style did. Whereas inker Bob Wiacek isn't suited to some pencillers, his style meshes perfectly with Smith, just as Austin's brought out every stroke of power in Byrne's pencils. The real test is that reproduction of the Smith/Wiacek art is crisp and clear with no haziness to the art at all, whereas Byrne's inking of his own pencils is consistently plagued by muddy translation to the comic book page.

Under Claremont, the X-Men has become a much more brutal and realistic title over the past few years. Even the word grim might apply. While in interviews he has talked about pulling back in the other direction, in #170 he pulled a shocker when Storm, who has sworn never to kill, stabs a vicious opponent through the heart. Although she no doubt knew that a mutant was present who would save the woman, the undisguised brutality of the act and the lack of recriminations remains to haunt the reader.

One of the weirdest stories Claremont ever did took place under the Claremont/Smith team when the X-Men encountered bizarre alien beings which Wolverine dubbed "the sleazoids." As with #143, Claremont was once more indulging in an homage to all that H.R. Giger did for the film **Alien** in that Giger's bizarre monster has become the monster cliche of the Eighties, and nowhere is it more present than in Claremont's X-Men. On the plus side, the story these creatures populated was filled with other sorts of wonders which didn't rely on the Sleazoids to strengthen their invention. The most talked about moment in **X-Men #165** is when Kitty Pryde, who loves Peter Rasputin, offers her 14 year old self to him in an understated scene whose intentions are all too clear, but Peter does have a nice way of saying, "This is not the proper time or place."

Although conceived with the foreign market in mind, the new X-Men have become a sensation everywhere.




*Under the magic touch of Kirby and Lee the early X-Men displayed a vitality that was not seen again until Claremont took over the book. Only Professor X remains from the early days of this book about young mutants.*

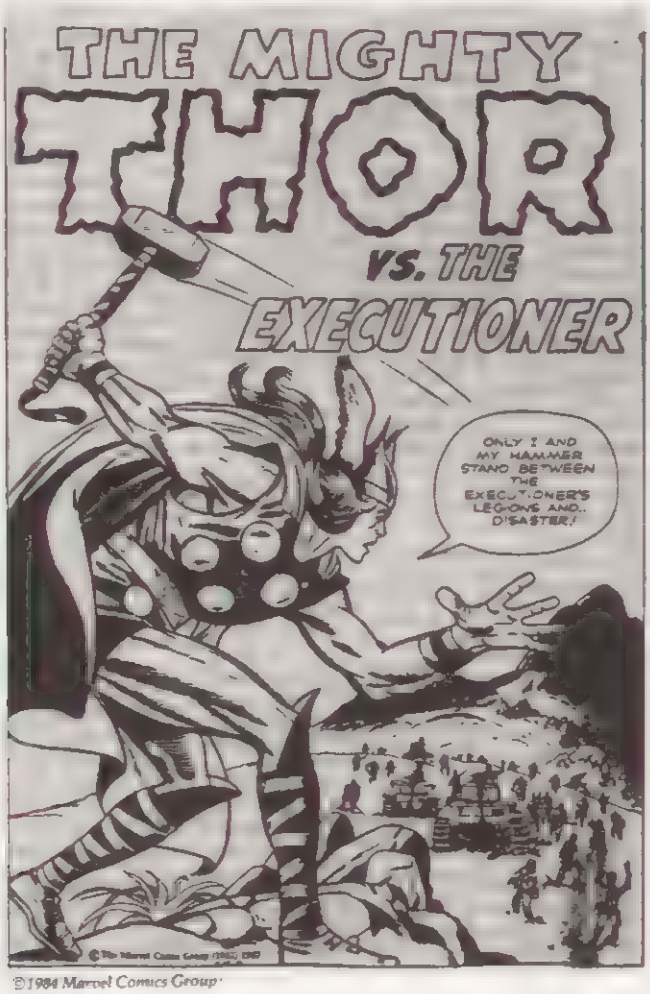
Guest appearances in other books are guaranteed to boost sales. Wolverine, the controversial and violent member of the team (whose personality seems to be rubbing off on Storm lately), was a hit in his own four issue mini-series drawn by Frank Miller. Old issues are being reprinted. A lukewarm companion title, **The New Mutants**, was launched last year (dubbed "the X-babies" by the X-Men's own Kitty Pryde), and Brent Anderson drew a popular X-Men graphic novel published book size on slick paper. Mary Jo Duffy even wrote an X-Men prose story for Marvel Novel Series #9: **The Marvel Superheroes**, published in 1979.

Whereas in the Sixties **The X-Men** seemed the ugly duckling of the Marvel line, in the Seventies and Eighties they've matured into the consistently enduring hit of the Marvel Age.

# HEROES

by James Van Hise

## THOR

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Back in the early days of Marvel comics, when the Fantastic Four had only just added uniforms to their look and Spider-Man didn't even have his own magazine yet, they were still in the tentative transition from producing monster stories to producing super-hero stories. Thus when they introduced their next super character, he fought the Stone Men from Saturn in his origin as they were not at all unlike the monsters which had been populating *Journey Into Mystery* and other Marvel titles during this period.

But even in this origin tale in *J.I.M* #83 (August 1962), Thor stood out just as uniquely as did the F.F. and the Hulk in their own titles. He was unusual and at least for a time seemed as though he could have been any of us. All he needed do is strike the cane he'd found on the ground and he'd be transformed into Thor. Don Blake just happened to be the one who found and now owned the enchanted cane just as Tony Stark just happened to be the one wearing Iron Man's super armor. That perception of the character would change but it would be a slow, strange process.

The creation of Thor at Marvel is another case of conflicting histories. In *Origins of Marvel Comics* by Stan Lee (Simon & Schuster, 1974), Lee details the pattern of the character's creation in some detail.

Following the creation of the Fantastic Four, the Hulk and Spider-Man, Lee felt that the only character he could come up with that would be stronger than any of them would be something he called "super-God", but he didn't think the world was quite ready for that. Why he was stuck on thinking only in terms of strength is uncertain as he followed up Thor with characters which were by no means stronger, but were definitely different and creative, such as Ant-Man and Iron

Man.

But the Super-God concept kept nagging him. "There was no way we could present a strip featuring God without possibly offending any reader of almost any religious affiliation," said Lee, "Or could we? A thought suddenly struck me. During a recent radio interview, the talk-show host and I had been discussing our Marvel stories and he had referred to them as twentieth-century mythology. It was his feeling that we were creating an entire contemporary mythos, a family of legends that might be handed down to future generations just as those we had read as children had been handed down to us. One of the points he made was that the Marvel heroes had some of the charisma, some of the flavor, of ancient fairy tales, of ancient Greek and Norse mythology. And that was what grabbed me. That was the answer.

"I couldn't—I wouldn't—do a series featuring God as a comic book hero. But I could—and would—do a series featuring a god as a comic book hero. After all, ever since man has walked the Earth there have been legends of gods and their goddesses, their problems, their battles, their triumphs and their defeats. Okay. Since we were the legend makers of today, we'd simply take what had gone before, build on it, embellish it, and come up with our own version of the continuing saga of good versus evil—god-wise, that is."

And yet Jack Kirby tells a slightly different version. One must recall that Kirby did a short-lived feature for Timely called "Mercury", which was very similar to Marvel's Thor of almost twenty years later. "Yes," Kirby explained, "and I also did a version of Thor for D.C. in the Fifties before I did him for Marvel. He had a red beard but he was a legendary figure, which I liked. I liked the figure of Thor at D.C. and I created Thor at Marvel because I was forever enamored of legends and I knew all about these legends, which is why I knew about Balder, Heimdall and

1966 Marvel Comics Group

Odin. I tried to update Thor and put him in a superhero costume, and he looked great in it and everybody loved him, but he was still Thor."

Regarding his inception of Thor, Stan Lee stated that, "As far as I can remember, Norse mythology always turned me on. There was something about those mighty, horn-helmeted Vikings and their tales of Valhalla, of Ragnarok, of the Aesir, the Fire Demons and immortal, eternal Asgard, home of the gods. If ever there was a rich lode of material into which Marvel might dip, it was there—and we would mine it."

On Kirby's contribution, Lee was uncharacteristically laconic in *Origins of Marvel Comics*, devoting a couple of quick sentences to this aspect whereas he had run on at length about every other facet of the character. It should be recalled that when this book was written in 1973, Jack Kirby was working for D.C., having parted company from Marvel because, "If I did come up with an idea at Marvel, they'd take it away from me and I lost all association with it."

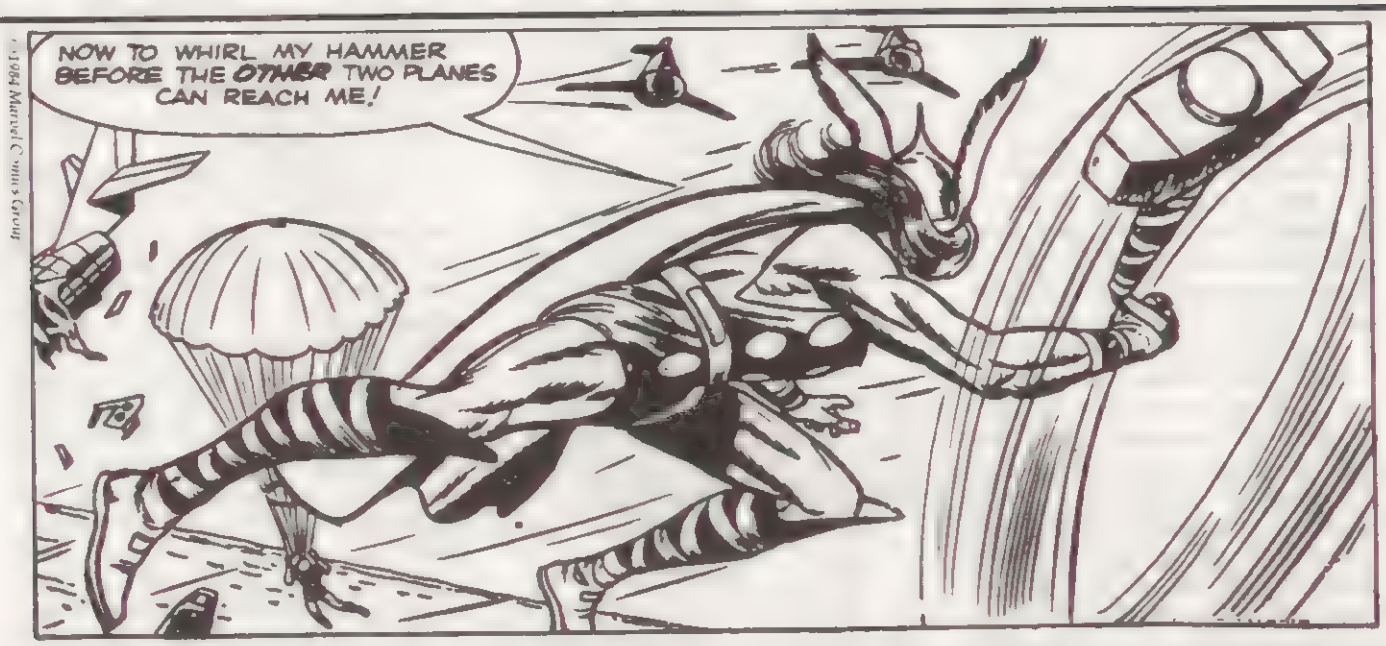
What Lee had to say about Kirby's initial creative association with Thor was this: "As for Jolly Jack, he had done his usual sensational job. He made the Thunder God look just like a God of Thunder should. It took a lot of courage, too. You've got to remember that Thor had long blond hair before it became fashionable among us mere mortals—before the Beatles had made the scene. Had anyone but Jack Kirby been the artist, it's barely possible that the ol' hammer thrower's masculinity might have been in question. But we managed to carry it off."

Zounds!

While Lee takes credit for the concept and the plot, he credits his brother, Larry Leiber, with the script. (Lee's real name was Stanley Martin Leiber and only later did he legally change his name to what had only been a pen name for his comics work, Stan Lee.) Stan even goes out of his way to credit Larry with having come up with the name of Thor's hammer as an *Uru* hammer. Leiber wrote only the first few issues of Thor's adventures, up through *Journey Into Mystery* #91. Then someone named "R. Berns" took over the scripting and produced some fairly routine stories.

Kirby maintains that he plotted Thor from the start. "I wrote all of the stories that I drew, right from the start. I put notes next to each panel to indicate what was happening and what was being said. I always did it that way. Someone else just translated into captions and dialogue. That's the truth and it's up to you whether you want to believe it."

This is backed up further by a story told by Mark Evanier in a recent APA (Amateur Press Association publication; a type of very limited distribution fanzine). He related how for years Kirby has been plagued by people wanting to get the same kind of sweetheart deal as Kirby's writer that Stan Lee had. This persisted when Kirby was at Marvel as well as long after. The fact is that Kirby would plot, draw and hand in the art with liner notes for the scripter to follow. Thus the writer had very little work to do as Kirby had




already done half the work for them, which is a very unusual arrangement. The closest Marvel ever came to publicly acknowledging this special style of collaboration was when they'd credit the story and art as being "By Stan Lee and Jack Kirby" without specifying who did what, although the unspoken assumption would be that Lee wrote it and Kirby drew it. In retrospect it did look a little peculiar in light of the fact that the other people (the inker, letterer) received very specific credits rather than the amorphous, all-encompassing ones given Lee and Kirby. It should be noted that when Kirby did return to Marvel in the mid to late Seventies, he did not return to the strips he'd worked on with Lee, such as Thor and the Fantastic Four, but did original features as well as books he could become more closely associated with such as Black Panther, Machine Man and the Eternals or with something he'd *always* been associated with, such as Captain America.

The origin of Thor was a simple 13 page story drawn by Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott which showed lame Doctor Don Blake finding the enchanted cane, discovering its power which transformed him into Thor and driving off the powerful menace of the Stone Men from Saturn. His speech pattern was pretty normal, the only hint of the archaic pattern it would adopt later was the quote from Shakespeare, "Iron bars do not a prison make."

In *J.I.M.* #84, Thor journeyed to the troubled republic of San Diablo in the guise of Don Blake where he battled the Communist menace of The Executioner. The story is a fast paced tableau which epitomizes the early Marvel super-hero adventures as Thor battles enemy forces in the Kirby style that rewrote comics in Marvel's image, from Thor chopping aircraft in half with his hammer to causing a tank to vibrate to pieces harmlessly around its crew. There was also the, "I mustn't let them learn my secret" tension so common in the early stories of the Marvel heroes. This is less prevalent today in most books and is nonexistent in *Thor*, and has been for years.

"Trapped By Loki, The God Of Mischief!" in *J.I.M.* #85 introduced the puzzling concept of the Asgardian gods treating this Thor as the real one even though he was just Don Blake in possession of Thor's identity, a concept which would not be fully worked out and resolved for several years. Here Loki escapes from Asgard and confronts Thor on Earth where he must use his knowledge of Norse mythology to understand who and what Loki is. When Thor returns Loki to Asgard via his hammer, Odin and the others react very matter-of-factly about the whole thing. But why?

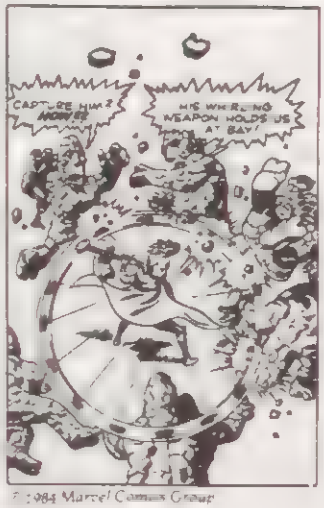
In story after story it becomes clear that this really is Thor, and yet it's also Don Blake. Blake/Thor loves his nurse, Jane Foster, but Odin refuses Thor's request to marry a mortal or have Odin make her an immortal. If Blake were merely the image of Thor he could do as he pleased, so again this nagging question remains, causing a schizophrenia in the storyline because didn't Blake just find the cane by accident and gain the *power* of Thor? This basic question remains a riddle until Thor himself demands the truth in #159, "Who is Don Blake?", in the December 1968 issue, some six years after Thor was introduced. But more of that later.

While Kirby remained *the* artist of Thor until the early Seventies, his involvement with the book during the first eighteen months was only tentative. He drew it through #89 and then did only numbers 94 and 97 before resuming as the regular artist with #101, although he still drew all of the covers on the issues when he was ab-

sent from the Thor strip, thus helping the title retain an identifiable thread of continuity. The fill-in artists were Al Hartley (#90), Joe Sinnott (numbers 91, 92, 94-96, where he drew Thor's hammer with a handle which looked to be about three feet long) and Don Heck (numbers 98-100). About this time Marvel made an announcement in some of their titles that Thor had been neglected by them for awhile but that they were striving to turn that around, and Kirby's return to the title proved that to be no idle boast.

Time travel has always been one of my favorite plot devices and so it's little wonder that I have special admiration for issues #86 and #101-102 which featured Zarrko, the Tomorrow Man. These stories read much more like D.C. plots of the early Sixties what with Thor following the villain into the future after he's stolen something from our time. These stories, as well as all of the early Thor adventures, depend much more on Thor using his wits and wiles than solving things with a shattering blow of his hammer. The fight scenes are balanced with well thought out stories where interesting little things happen which are much more pleasureable than watching Thor and some menace rearrange the landscape of Manhattan Island one more time. In #86, when a robot grabs Thor's hammer, leaving him only sixty seconds of power before he reverts to his Don Blake identity, instead of tearing up the robot he tears up the floor, finds a water pipe and uses the fluid to disable *all* of the giant robots to regain his hammer. In #102, when forced to do Zarrko's bidding in order to save the Earth of our time, Thor outsmarts Zarrko by disabling Zarrko's foes through clever, non-violent means instead of engaging in armed combat with them.

Unfortunately, #101 also introduced what would become a tiresome cliche —Odin gets mad at Thor and reduces his power by half. This was used as



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constantly in Thor as the devices of the Fantastic Four losing their power and Spider-Man hanging up his uniform were used in those other titles. They are all cliches which become tiresome quickly.

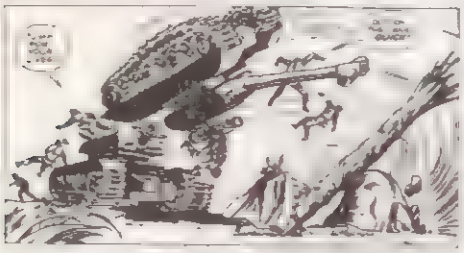
In order to introduce the readers to the Norse mythology behind the comic, #97 began the long running series "Tales Of Asgard", which proved to be a harbinger of what the comic would become several years later.

Instead of just having Loki return time after time, new Asgardian menaces appeared such as the Enchantress, the Executioner and Surtur, the fire demon. The title was changing its focus from strictly Earthbound stories to tales wherein Asgard formed a stronger and stronger part of the adventures. When the stories were divided half and half between Earthly menaces and cosmic Asgardian ones, the mix and contrast worked well. After the book began dwelling on Asgardian tales to the virtual exclusion of Earthly ones, a dull sameness overtook the title. It seemed that the latest issue had to strive to be even more cosmic than the last until it all seemed terribly distant and far removed. It was the contrast of Thor the god of thunder facing Earthly menaces which went a long way towards making the stories interesting and making *Thor* one of my favorite Sixties comic books.

*Thor* numbers 105 and 106 are two of the best early stories, featuring the team-up of The Cobra and Mr. Hyde (two interesting and off-beat villains). The Cobra is an ex-con who gained his powers after being bitten by a radioactive cobra (ho-hum) while Hyde perfected a drug which can give him enormous strength and then change him back when he takes an antidote pill. Being so different they make an interesting team. Issue #105 has a great scene where they capture Don Blake while looking for Thor and Blake explains that if they strike his cane on the floor that it will summon Thor. In this case it's shown that even if *someone else* holds the cane and strikes it, Blake will still be transformed into Thor. Issue #106 has some excellent action sequences, showing how this kind of thing can be done without resorting to the demolition derby cliche of mindless fisticuffs. When Hyde surprises Thor and knocks the hammer from his hand, Thor vows, "Let it lay!! If I cannot defeat this evil being bare-handed within one minute, I am not worthy of the name *Thor*!!" Thus an element of tension and suspense is added to the destructive fight sequence, adding an emotional undertone in the process. It's recurring little ideas like this which make these early tales stand out.

Other interesting issues here are #107, which introduced the Grey Gargoyle, #109 in which he faces Magneto, #110 and #111 with the Cobra and Hyde again, and especially #112 in which Thor battles the Hulk in an untold segment from the story which took place in *Avengers* #3 when the team battled The Hulk and Namor. Issue #114 introduced the Absorbing Man, another powerful Earthbound foe (although secretly abetted by Loki) who made for some great early stories.

With issue #116, Vince Colletta took over the inking from Chic Stone, who'd



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been inking the book since #102. While Colletta only inked a handful of the F.F.'s which Kirby drew, he inked most of the rest of Kirby's run on *Thor*. But while Colletta's inking on *The Fantastic Four* seemed cold, his inking on Thor shaped up quickly as though he enjoyed this book much more than others he'd done. The recent revelation that Colletta enjoys fantasy much more than standard super-hero fare tends to bear this out as Thor was entering its more cosmic period here.

Issue #118 introduced The Destroyer, a device of Asgardian origin which was nonetheless stored on Earth. Since it's an Earthbound story it seems more science fiction than the Asgardian fantasies usually do.

*Thor* Annual numbers 1 and 2 appeared when Kirby and Colletta were doing the book and the first annual introduced Hercules. While at first he seemed little different than Thor, later appearances shaped his character in more interesting directions. The second annual reintroduced The Destroyer, this time animated by Loki.

*Thor* #126 featured a fine rematch between the Asgardian and Hercules in which Odin's robbing Thor of half of his power cliche is used well for the final time. Thereafter it was tiresome.

The 1966 issues of *Thor* featured a marvelous creative outburst and stories which would be long remembered. In #130, Thor journeyed to the netherworld to rescue Hercules from Pluto. Issues 131-133 featured the Colonizer outer space trilogy which climaxed with the introduction of the living planet, Ego. It was in issues 134 and 135 that the High Evolutionary and his beastman of Wundagore were introduced.

It was issue #136 which disposed of the Jane Foster subplot, seemingly once and for all (until it was only recently revived), and introduced the goddess Sif as Thor's love interest. Now the series was leaving the Earthbound stories behind virtually once and for all. Only occasional interesting departures such as "The Growing Man" in #140, "The Wrath of Replicus" in #141 and "The Sourge of the Super-Skrull!" in #142 served as a respite and recalled the fine earlier issues before the book went off the deep end into fantasy. Even when he did face Earthly menaces thereafter, he tended to have Asgardians at his side, smothering Thor's uniqueness.

*Thor* #159 finally unravels the Don Blake/Thor dilemma by revealing that Thor was sent to Earth in the guise of Blake years ago in order to learn humility. They were one and the same all along and when Blake found the walking stick it was because Odin had decreed that it was time for Thor to regain his immortal guise. Issue #158 led up to this revelation with a framing device that reprinted the origin from #83. Marvel retells their origins about every three years because they feel that a turnover to many new readers has taken place within that time.

In these later issues of Kirby's stint, *Thor* was at its best in the science fiction stories which took place out in space and far from Asgard. Numbers 160-162 had Galactus menacing the planet Ego and Thor was apprised of the menace by the Recorder, the robot introduced in the sf trilogy in issues 131-133. Thor confronted Galactus again in issues 168 and 169 to learn the being's origin.

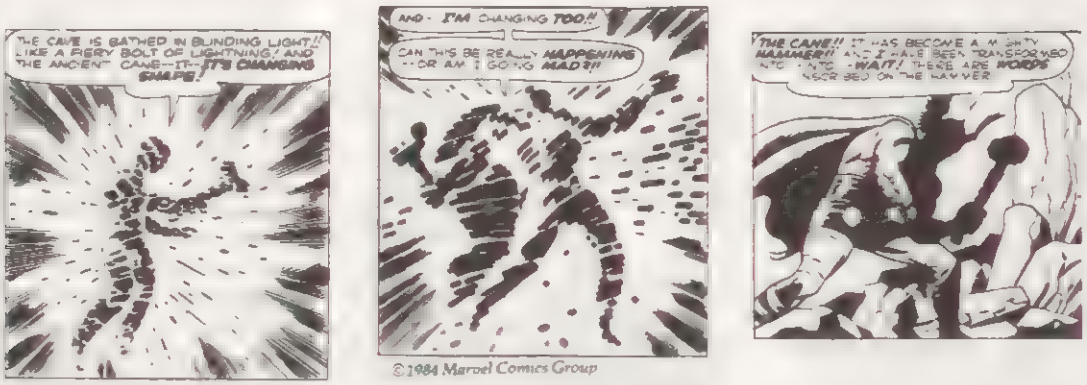
Numbers 165 and 166 featured the character called "Him" who was introduced in *Fantastic Four* #67 and who would later become known as Adam Warlock when transformed by Roy Thomas and Gil Kane. A few of these later issues had particularly fine inking by the late Bill Everett and even a couple by George Klein.

Kirby's last issue was #177, the June 1970 issue, which marked his departure for D.C. comics. Subsequent artists, whether they be Neal Adams (on numbers 180 and 181) or John Buscema, attempted to draw the book with a Kirby look, but the focus of the character had become so dispersed that it no longer mattered.

Roy Thomas tried to bring the book more into line with traditional Norse mythology during his stint, as opposed to the pop mythology which Marvel had been using over the years. This is when Odin lost an eye and Balder died (as mythology chronicled) only to be resurrected later. One of the most oddball issues during this time was #280 in which Wayne Boring (who drew many classic Superman stories in the Fifties and Sixties) was the guest artist for one issue. The experiment would have been more successful had he, instead of Tom Palmer, inked his own work just as he had in the Sixties at D.C.

Thor proved himsef to be mighty indeed by hanging on no matter what was done to him, no matter how good, bad or indifferent the character was handled. But at last the series is turning around into the type of book it was back in the Sixties under Jack Kirby.

*Thor* #337 swept fandom by storm recently when Walt Simonson took over as the writer/artist/inker of the title and revitalized a book which looked as though it couldn't have been given a new life even if you'd shot three million volts through it. But Simonson showed what was possible in just three issues the same way that Frank Miller


THE CANE IS BATHED IN BLINDING LIGHT!! LIKE A FIERY BOLT OF LIGHTNING! AND THE ANCIENT CANE--IT-- IT'S CHANGING SHAPE!
AND-- I'M CHANGING TOO!!
CAN THIS BE REALLY HAPPENING --OR AM I GOING MAD?!!
THE CANE!! IT HAS BECOME A MIGHTY HAMMER!!! AND I HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO-- INTO-- WAIT! THERE ARE WORDS INSCRIBED ON THE HAMMER
NO! I'M NOT MAD!! I CAN FEEL MY BODY BURSTING WITH POWER-- POWER SUCH AS I'VE NEVER KNOWN!!
"WHOSOEVER HOLDS THIS HAMMER, IF HE BE WORTHY, SHALL POSSESS THE POWER OF... THOR
THOR!! THE LEGENDARY GOD OF THUNDER!! THE MIGHTIEST WARRIOR OF ALL MYTHOLOGY! THIS IS HIS HAMMER!! AND I-- I AM THOR!!!
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pumped Daredevil from a third string character into a first rate book. The same creativity that Simonson brought to the minor character The Manhunter in *Detective Comics* numbers 337-443 in '73-'74, he's infused into Thor. This is especially surprising since Simonson pencilled *Thor* numbers 261-269 a few years before, but since he neither wrote nor inked those issues, his truly distinctive approach remained out of sight. I'd been wondering when Simonson was going to break out with something as interesting as The Manhunter again, and he's really done it here.

In *Marvel Age* #6, shortly before *Thor* #337 appeared, Simonson outlined some of his plans for the book which will take him up at least through issue #350 and possibly beyond. "I have some major changes in mind. There are two major directions: One feeling I have about *Thor* is that the book has gotten extremely top-heavy. For example, you have a zillion pantheons of deities all floating around. When Hercules showed up the first time it was great—but now, you've got Egyptian gods, Incan gods, Hindu gods. After a while, in that company, Thor is just one more super-powered guy. It may be that he's the best of all those guys—but Thor sort of gets lost in the shuffle. I plan to do some major surgery in the vast supporting cast that has grown around the lead character in the last twenty years.

"I'd like to create a sort of underlying unity among the characters, both on Earth and in Asgard. I'm a long-time fan of Thor. Basically, I would like to make Thor an interesting book to read, and to do that I'd like to make the book an interesting book to create. I expect I will be doing a sort of classic Thor. I don't expect to change the character of Thor...but I'd like to enlarge on Thor's character and those of the characters around him.

"An example: Odin's very existence causes a lot of problems. He's so powerful that when Thor can't handle a really big danger Odin gets dragged in to take care of it. Or else you get Odin against Thor. Odin says 'Son, you've been proud for the 334th time—once too often—and I'm gonn' nail you to the wall!' This always struck me as funny—of all the characters in that book who needed lessons in humility, Thor is maybe number *two* in line. So, I'd like to make Odin brighter and put him more in the background."

Without a doubt Simonson has returned the kind of enervating kinetic storytelling to the book which it hasn't seen since the early Sixties. There is a tense sense of immediacy in the Simonson Thor, as well as a seemingly lost sense of wonder for the character and the possibilities inherent in the strip. It's almost as though the book has the freshness one finds in a great comic which is just starting out new. It's these sensations of something being reborn with explosive enthusiasm that Fandom has picked up on in embracing a character and a comic which had been stale for more than a decade.

A few years ago, when Mike Zeck told me that he was planning to leave *Master of Kung Fu* to do something different, I said that he ought to think about doing Thor because it needed an infusion of new blood and fresh ideas. The book just seemed to be lying there, existing from month to month without a drive or sense of purpose. If any book had room for the most improvement it was *Thor* and Walt Simonson is proving that now on a monthly basis by showing just how good a comic can be when someone grasps it by the creative horns and twirls it from top to bottom.

# HEROES

## THE AVENGERS

By James Van Hise

While all of Marvel's books have had changes rung on them throughout their existence, the all time record holder must be *The Avengers*. Conceived about the same time as *The X-Men*, it once again returned to the Justice League of America superhero group concept which inspired the creation of the *Fantastic Four*, but this time paralleled the concept much further by uniting several of marvel's major characters into one team book.

Besides creating a new title, this appealing series of "Book-Length Super-Epics featuring some of the Earth's Greatest Super-Heroes!" (as issue number one dubbed them), also served to acquaint fans of Thor or the Hulk with Iron Man and the Ant-Man, or visa-versa. For those who hadn't been following the other titles, *The Avengers* introduced them to these other characters and possibly created a new interest in them enough so that the reader would begin buying the other character's books. This is what happened to me, for in my case it showed me that Thor was a much more interesting character than I'd thought and so in 1964, I began collecting it and it quickly became one of my favorites.

It was no coincidence that all of the other characters in *Avengers #1* had their own series elsewhere except for the Hulk. Thor was starring in *Journey Into Mystery*, Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense* and Ant-Man and the Wasp in *Tales to Astonish*. These titles would eventually be changed to reflect the

character who starred in them, but like *The Avengers*, the roster on some would alter before the title change took place. *Journey Into Mystery* became *Thor* but by that time *Tales of Suspense* was featuring both Iron Man and Captain America and it was decided to spin Iron Man off into his own separate book and change *Tales of Suspense* into *Captain America* with #100. *Tales to Astonish*, meanwhile, had added the Hulk as a back-up strip to Giant-Man (formerly Ant-Man), but the Hulk eclipsed Giant-Man in reader interest until after innumerable costume changes Giant-Man faded out and was replaced by the Sub-Mariner (who was the villain in *Avengers #3*). Thus Giant-Man (later known as Yellow-Jacket) appeared only in *The Avengers* after losing his own strip, but by this time the title was a popular one on its own and was no longer being used as a shill to popularize and promote the solo character books. Ironically, it was Ant-Man's idea at the end of *Avengers #1* to create the team and that title became his salvation for years to come until he finally faded away after almost two decades of struggling to find an interesting costumed identity.

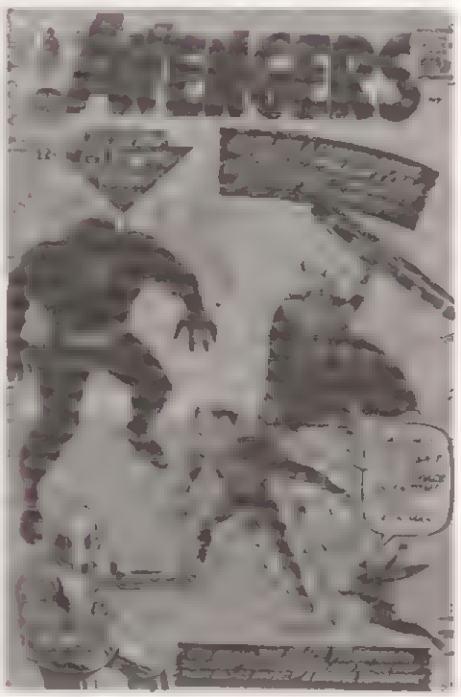
*Avengers #1* was a series of incidents held together by the secret manipulations of Loki as he struggled to lure Thor to Asgard for a showdown. Using the Hulk as bait, Loki frames the Hulk in an apparent train wreck attempt and then sees to it that when the Teen Brigade (established in *Hulk #6*) tries to summon the Fantastic Four to get to the bottom of the incident, the radio beam is misdirected so that Thor receives the message. Unbeknownst to Loki, though, the transmission is also picked up by Iron man and Ant-Man. All of these characters are introduced in such a way that their abilities and identities are quickly and easily explained to readers unfamiliar with them. Even Rick Jones, the Hulk's sidekick during this period, is shown reading about the Hulk's apparent attack on a train and exclaiming, "It can't be! He'd never do a thing like that!...No matter what!! Or...Or would he?" which establishes the uneasy alliance Rick has with the Hulk.

The story finally unfolds into a battle between Thor and Loki and of Iron Man, Ant-Man and the Wasp versus the Hulk. The Hulk and Thor clearly dominate the action as they're more colorful characters. Iron Man still had his old, bulky gold armor here and the Ant-Man was limited by his size to taking indirect action and using ants to carry out his orders. Even so, the Ant-Man was an interesting character in his day and when used properly in later issues, showed how interesting he could be.

The work here by Jack Kirby shows why he was the pre-eminent super-hero artist of the Sixties. His layouts and composition are straightforward and uncluttered, as well as dynamic. Panels are seldom crowded and often backgrounds are sparse to emphasize the characters and action in the foreground, which is important when up to nine panels per page are used as they are on several pages in the book. This was before Kirby started drawing figures which were more angular and with hard edges rather than the smooth human dynamics he did so well in comics in the Sixties. This one comic is an excellent textbook of comic book storytelling in the superhero form as it employs many types of action and character interaction.

The first eight issues of the *Avengers* were drawn by Kirby, although *The Jack Kirby Treasury* (1982) spuriously credits Kirby with every issue up through #16. (Kirby did do the layouts of #16.)

The first eight issues are all very strong and some of the best in the series. They also bring up the question of how direct Kirby's involvement with the writing was as he's stated that he plotted every book he did for Marvel. Once again, the style of approach to the writing changed when Kirby stopped drawing the book and the direction



THE AVENGERS
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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THIS IS THE ISSUE YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR!!
"THE HULK AND SUB-MARINER VS. THE AVENGERS!"
ONE OF THE GREATEST BATTLES OF ALL TIME!!

it had during the first eight issues diffused and lost focus. The first eight seemed to be following a thought out pattern. Beginning with number nine the title started becoming a bit aimless for awhile.

During those first few issues, though, a lot happened. Enough so that the reader hungered to see what would happen the following month.

In issue #2, a character called The Space Phantom imitated the various Avengers in order to cause them to fight amongst themselves, and true to the spirit of Marvel comics, the characters never confronted one another or demanded an explanation for such and so, they just attacked as soon as they saw the supposedly offending party. It was no wonder that even after the truth came out the Hulk decided to wash his hands of them because of how quickly they were ready to mistrust him with no questions asked.

This carried over into #3 when the Hulk joined forces with another misanthrope, the Sub-mariner, to take revenge on Mankind and in the process have a full-tilt, knock-down, drag-out, all-the-stops-pulled-out fight as only Jack Kirby can do them. Twenty-three pages weren't enough to hold all the action as *Thor #112* featured a flash-back to that issue of a fight between Thor and the Hulk which took place off-stage in *Avengers #3*, so the effects of that issue were still being experienced months later.

But issue #4 is the one which took the fans by surprise and became a landmark. Just as *Fantastic Four #4* re-introduced the World War II character of Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner, *Avengers*

*#4* reintroduced Captain America!

Captain America had seemingly reappeared, drawn by Jack Kirby, in *Strange Tales #114*, but this turned out to be an old foe of the Human Torch's who had disguised himself as Cap. Since the foe was actually the Acrobat, his imitation was nearly flawless. When Captain America was given his own strip in *Tales Of Suspense*, The Acrobat turned up there as well, as sort of a hero/villain.

Headlined "The Return of Captain America" on the cover, the story opened with Namor licking his wounds after the battle in *Avengers #3* and dispersing a group of Eskimos who are worshiping a strange icy slab which contains a dark shape trapped within. Namor hurls it into the sea where the warm waters of the Gulf Stream cause the ice to slowly melt. On their way back from the remote island where the battle with Namor and the Hulk transpired, the Avengers spot the floating body from the observation port of their special undersea craft. Bringing the body aboard, they find a frozen figure wearing a familiar red, white and blue costume beneath the tattered remains of an army uniform. Captain America revives from suspended animation in dramatic fashion and after some quick reflex tests to show that he's not an imposter (at least they didn't fight it out, which showed rare restraint on Marvel's part), Cap explained how he had dropped from a booby-trapped plane and was hurled into the sea by the same explosion which killed his World War II partner, Bucky Barnes. Somehow, when he sunk into the sea, his body froze, although how that occured, exactly is brushed over since Cap certainly couldn't remember what happened when he was unconscious. In the mighty Marvel Age of reexploring history and tying up loose ends, there may be a story in this.

For several years fans debated over how the Fifties Captain America fit into all this. Was all that stuff Earth Two like D.C.'s Justice Society stories? Eventually it was explained in the Seventies that the Fifties Cap was a second Captain America created with an imitation of the formula which brought the first one into being; an imperfect formula which eventually drove the second Captain America crazy. This explanation went down hard with fans who'd read Cap's adventures in the Fifties and felt cheated being told that it was never really Cap at all, but just a crazed commie hunter. But that's how the rewritten history went.

There are interesting scenes in *Avengers #4* of Cap returning to civilization and finding himself knee-deep in a mystery involving an eons old alien and a denouement which takes place on another remote island and in the middle of a pitched battle with the legions of the Sub-Mariner.

The reast of the Kirby issues read equally interesting, such as "Invasion of the Lava Men" in #5 (spun off from ideas introduced in *Thor #97*), "Masters of Evil" in #6, wherein various foes of the Avengers teamed up, including the interesting but seldom used Radioactive Man, and "Kang, the Conqueror" in #8 which introduced the time lord and expanded the paradox which linked him to Rama-Tut (*Fantastic Four #19*) and Dr. Doom. The paradox was later expanded still further into an unnecessarily contrived and complicated scheme of characters.

*Avengers #9* introduced and killed off Wonder Man, a character who would be revived years later to become part of the Avengers.

Issue #16 began what would become a tradition, that of a rapid turnover of the roster so that members would come and go as though through a revolving door. Thor and Iron Man left the group and they were replaced by Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. It wasn't quite the same. This was ostensibly done because Thor was so powerful that he could generally take on the menaces single-handed and didn't really need the help of the others. At times one could detect the writer holding back on

displaying just how powerful Thor really was. A similar argument could be made for Iron Man in the absence of Thor, certainly when the remaining members were Captain America, Giant-Man, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. The powered down lineup also signaled powered down stories. Giant-Man changed his name to Goliath but a costume change doesn't change the character. Marvel was clearly uncertain what to do with him other than drop his own strip from *Tales to Astonish* where he had begun as one of Marvel's first super-heroes.

Soon Hawkeye and the Black Panther were added to the line-up, which made for more interest and diversity, but it was the introduction of the Vision in *Avengers #57* that really gave the stories a boost. The android avenger, created by Hank Pym and then used by the computer Ulton 5 as an unknowing agent, was an interesting device, although the frequent return of the supposedly destroyed computer (Ultron 6, etc., etc.) did become tiresome.

One of the more interesting stories in this period was "Some Say The World Will End In Fire, Some Say In Ice!" in *Avengers #61.* Written by Roy Thomas and drawn by John Buscema, with crisp inks by George Klein, it was the conclusion of a story begun in *Dr. Strange #178* and guest-starred not only the Master of the Mystic Arts, but the Black Knight as well. This late Sixties issue was from the period when John Buscema was still bringing a lot of energy and enchantment to his work, such as he did in those classic issues of the *Silver Surfer.* The inking by Klein is careful and defined, not like the too often rushed looking inking which fills many comics today.

During this period Goliath went through another change when Hank Pym became schizophrenic and adopted the identity of Yellowjacket in which he masqueraded as a mystery man to the other Avengers. Shortly after this he gave up the Goliath identity in the belief that the years of growing and shrinking had brought on his brief mental imbalance. At this same time Hawkeye became disenchanted with his own contribution as an Avenger and in #63 he adopted the Goliath identity for a time, but after a few years he returned to the more popular Hawkeye identity.

*Avengers #66* and *67* featured two issues by a newcomer to Marvel at the time, namely one Barry Smith. This was during Smith's Kirby imitation period and the inking by Syd Shores on #66 complimented Smith's pencils best and ironed out any awkwardness, whereas the George Klein inking on #67 left some awkward attempts at Kirby-style exaggeration intact (such as panel one on page ten in which Yellowjacket's legs are unsuccessfully foreshortened). As far as Smith's Kirby imitations went, #66 looked smooth and natural whereas #67 was very self-conscious and forced by comparison.

Sometime before, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch had left the Avengers when Wanda lost her hex power. They reappeared in #75 when during her attempts to regain it magically, she encounters Arkon and is kidnapped to his other

dimensional world. The appearance of Arkon, a Conan type character in a science fiction setting, predated the appearance of Marvel's Conan by less than a handful of months. The character achieved more personality in the conclusion of #76 and with slick art by John Buscema and Tom Palmer, it remains one of the more memorable in the series long run. Oddly enough, when the Avengers burst through the barrier to reach Arkon's world, Thor and Iron Man are with them even though they had not appeared in the story before that moment. It's revealed that it was Thor's hammer which brought them through the barrier after all other efforts had failed, and the reappearance of these two old Avengers is a welcome one, making the story even more colorful.

Over the years the Avengers has become a rather large organization with provisional members, members on inactive status and the like and it was not at all unusual for inactive members like Thor and Iron Man to suddenly put in an appearance, especially since Tony Stark is Iron Man and the Avengers mansion is leased from him. Thor and Iron Man also guest-starred in the story in issues #80-82 and the problem of using Thor creatively came up again when it was Thor who single handedly ended the menace in the final showdown.

Although the origin of the Black Panther had appeared in the *Fantastic Four*, drawn by the character's creator, Jack Kirby, a slightly expanded version appeared in *Avengers #87* written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Frank Giacoia and Sal Buscema. Marvel had been of two minds during this time about using a black character named The Black Panther in their comics. Although created before the rise of the militant Black Panther party in the late Sixties, they found themselves with an interesting black character whose name was nonetheless coincidentally tied to a militant element. In an attempt to use this interesting black character and avoid controversy, they began referring to him as just "the Panther", which is what he's called in *Avengers #87*. On the cover Marvel backed off even further by never using The Black Panther's name in any form but rather his African name, T'Challa. The cover of #87 even proclaims, "Revealed At Last! The Origin Of T'Challa!" Although the cover makes it clear that he's a black character, new readers must

have wondered what in the world a "T'Challa" was. It would be another couple of years before the Black Panther's original name was completely restored.

The Black Panther was created by Jack Kirby with a sleek black costume which covered the character's entire body, except for the eyes. But when he began appearing in the Avengers, his mask was changed so that it was obvious that he was a black character. Unfortunately, this change made the costume look awkward somehow rather than mysterious and cat-like such as Kirby had intended. After several issues the costume reverted back to its original and more effective form.

Perhaps the single best known Avengers saga outside of the return of Captain America in #4 was the Kree/Skrull War series which began in #89 and concluded in #97. This graphic novel (which is what it truly was) involved Captain Marvel and most all of the Avengers of the time (Thor, Iron Man, Captain America, the Vision, Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch and Goliath). It concerned the Kree branding Captain Marvel as a traitor to their race and then the Skrull going after Mar-vell for information he possessed. In the middle of all this, Mar-vell is branded an enemy alien by Congress and is wanted for questioning about a Kree attempt against Earth made at the North Pole. The Avengers harbor Captain Marvel in secret while they attempt to clear his name. The Inhumans, who are actually Kree descendants, come into the middle of all this as well and it's not surprising that the whole saga spanned nine issues. So much happened each issue, with important plot events following swiftly on top of one another, that unlike other multi-part stories done in other books, this one was neither padded nor stretched beyond the requirements of the story. It's no wonder that it's considered the crowning touch to Roy Thomas's several year stint as writer on the book.

As with any Marvel comic, musical artists were played with the Avengers so that the illustrative team changed every few issues. But during the most crucial issues of the Kree/Skrull War saga, Neal Adams stepped in to pencil issues #93-96 (with inks by Tom Palmer), which insured that Roy's star-spanning story would be translated into the most dynamic visual terms possible. (Marvel recently reprinted the last five

issues of this continued story, beginning with the Neal Adams issues, in a two-issue deluxe format on high quality paper.)

All four of the Thomas/Adams issues are excellent, but the one which stands out just slightly ahead of the others is #93, which features the Ant-Man in a "Journey To The Center Of The Android!" in chapter two. This is Ant-Man's only appearance in the Adams issues and he shows up just in time to enter the Vision in order to repair some delicate internal mechanisms which have immobilized the Avenger. But wasn't he just Yellowjacket a couple of issues before? The reasoning presented is that the Avengers had sent out a call for the original team to appear, and Henry Pym was the Ant-Man way back when. Sure it's contrived but it's okay since Ant-Man has always been the most interesting of the character's many versions. Henry Pym would return a few issues later as Yellowjacket once again and the Ant-Man identity would be given over to an entirely different person some years later.

The Ant-Man section is interesting not just for nostalgia's sake, but because Neal Adams captures all the romance of the character that Kirby did during his first few stories beginning back in *Tales To Astonish #35*. The interior of the Vision as seen by Ant-Man is fascinating and unusual and is the high point of the issue. This sequence was clearly the inspiration for a similar one involving the new Ant-Man in *Iron Man #133* when Ant-Man had to find his way through the walls of Tony Stark's armor in order to make a crucial repair after Iron Man has been felled in a brutal fight with the Hulk. It's a nice idea but it pales next to the Adams/Palmer sequence in *Avengers #93*. This sequence in *Avengers* is so interesting that few people ever noticed that it was padded so that six new pages could be added in the middle of Ant-Man's passage when it was decided, at the last moment, that *Avengers #93* would be a thirty-four page, 25 cents issue instead of the standard twenty-three page, 15 cents issue. In fact it served as a bridge in that #92 was 15 cents while #94 was the first 20 cent issue (although still the same size as #92's fifteen cent version).

After Roy Thomas left *The Avengers*, a number of other writers followed in short order. Steve Englehart did some fine issues, but when he began having deadline problems, Gerry Conway was asked to take over the title. Steve Englehart was highly resentful of this and has even gone on record accusing Conway of outright stealing the book from him for no other reason than that Conway wanted to do *The Avengers* at Marvel having just come off writing the *Justice League of America* at DC. Conway denies those circumstances:

"I didn't actually even want to write the book, but the previous writer was late and even had I wanted to take on the title I would have wanted a couple months to gear up for it. As it was I had to jump right in without any planning as to where the title was heading. I only wrote it for eight issues so it was just an interim thing. I left the book just as abruptly as I'd joined it as it was."

*The Avengers* have never remained stagnant, though, no matter who was doing the book. The Vision married the Scarlet Witch (which opened the door on all sorts of unanswered questions regarding human/android marriage) and in *Giant Size Avengers #1* (1974, not to be confused with *The Avengers Annual #1*) it was revealed that the father of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch, was the Golden Age character The Whizzer. But that was what Roy Thomas wrote. In 1979 in issues #185-187, in a plot by Mark Gruenwald and Steven Grant (based on events put into motion by David Michelinie), it was strongly hinted that Magneto was their father (which was late proven to be fact) and that The Whizzer had been lying. But had he been lying when Roy Thomas spun his fable in 1974? If there's anything that Marvel has historically not liked to leave alone, it's history.

Another problem the Avengers encountered was the fluctuating size of the team. This came to a head in #181 (written by David Michelinie and drawn by John Byrne and Gene Day) when in order for The Avengers to regain their Avengers Priority rating with the government, the team was pared down to seven members: Iron Man, The Vision, Captain America, The Scarlet Witch, The Beast, The Wasp and The Falcon. The scene is amusingly handled by showing the pleased and surprised faces of each chosen member except that when The Falcon's name is announced, we're instead shown the startled face of Hawkeye. Other Avengers not chosen who were active at the time and present at the

meeting included Capt. Marvel, Wonder Man, the Guardians of the Galaxy, Thor, Yellowjacket, the Black Widow, Quicksilver, Hercules and Ms. Marvel, just to name a few. There's even a satirical interchange about how the Falcon was chosen by the Government representative in order to have minority representation, which ignores the fact that mutants, gods and androids are an even smaller minority than any racial group. This governmental interference in the roster was not lifted until #191.

Artists in the late Seventies and early Eighties included George Perez and John Byrne, showing that the title has long been considered a prestige book, although in the last couple of years the title has suffered in this regard, perhaps by the weak lineup which has been offered.

The annuals have had some special artists working on them. The most notable issues are #7 by Jim Starlin, which featured all of the major Avengers plus Adam Warlock, #8 by George Perez, #9 by Don Newton and #10 by Michael Golden.

A couple of the more interesting Avengers sagas of the past few years haven't even been real. *What If? #3* featured "What If The Avengers Had Never Been?", co-plotted by Jim Shooter and the story's artist, Gil Kane. Capturing the feel of the Sixties Marvels, Kane's story postulated a different direction from the ending of *Avengers #2* in which the whole group split up this time rather than just having the Hulk quit. Iron Man then decides to take on the hulk and Namor alone...and loses.

*What If? #20* postulated a Kree/Skrull war without the key contribution made by Rick Jones in *Avengers #97*, while *What If? #25* had Thor and the Avengers taking on Asgard.

Nowadays the Avengers lineup has fallen to lesser lights such as Starfox, the new Ms. Marvel, and worst of all, the She-Hulk. Issue #239 featured guest appearances by Hawkeye, Wonder Man, the Beast and the Black Panther which succeeded only in showing how weak the regular lineup is with Captain America and the Vision remaining the only interesting regular members.

The Avengers, because of its fluctuating lineup, has more potential for colorful stories than most any other book and this has been proven time and again. The current sad state was further underscored when 1983's Annual #12 needed to add Thor to brighten the lineup and pump up the story. Like any book, it goes through changes and seems to be neglected; but it remains the best book of its type next to the *Fantastic Four*, the *X-Men* and the *J.L.A.*

Certain interesting Avengers tie-ins have appeared over the years, the first being a regular novel written by Otto Binder and published in 1967, called *The Avengers Battle The Earth-Wrecker*. The lineup was Capt. America, Hawkeye, Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch and Goliath. A year later an original Captain America novel, *The Great Gold Steal* by Ted White, was also published by Bantam books.

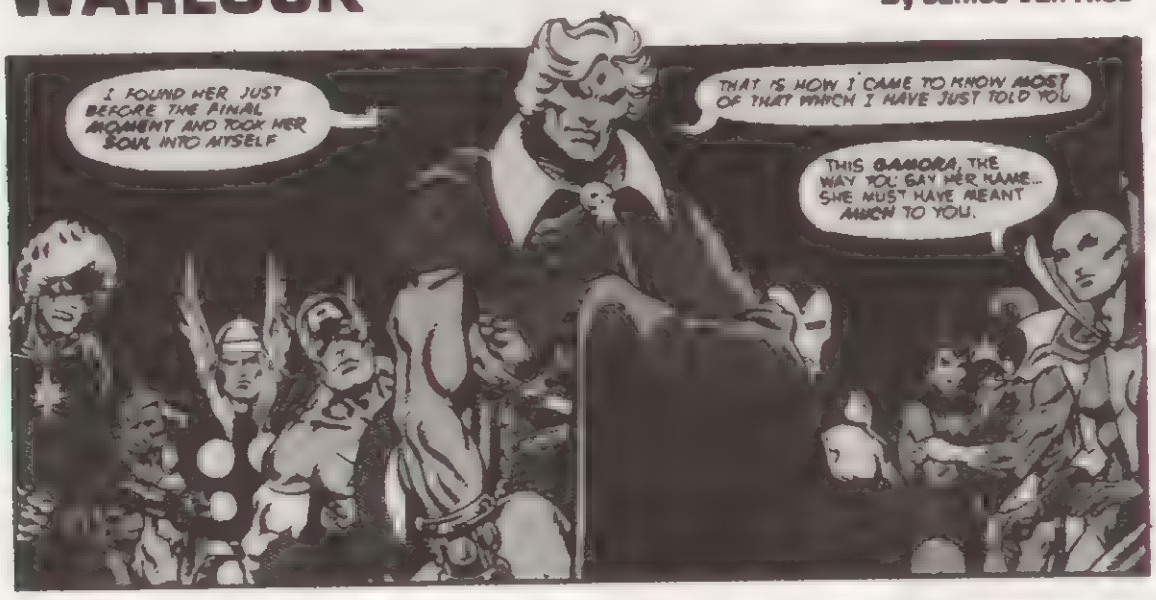
In 1979, Pocket Books published a whole series of Marvel superhero novels, including an Avengers novel by Jim Shooter and an Avengers novella which appeared in a collection of stories about the Hulk, the X-Men and Daredevil.

*The Avengers* remains an interesting book to watch, even if it isn't always worth looking at. Its track record is one of the most impressive in comics and demands attention for that reason alone.

# HEROES

## WARLOCK

**By James Van Hise**


I FOUND HER JUST BEFORE THE FINAL MOMENT AND TOOK HER SOUL INTO MYSELF
THAT IS HOW I CAME TO KNOW MOST OF THAT WHICH I HAVE JUST TOLD YOU
THIS GAMORA, THE WAY YOU SAY HER NAME... SHE MUST HAVE MEANT MUCH TO YOU.

Marvel is well known for revamping characters if they seem to be growing stale, but never was this done with as much style as with Adam Warlock. His transformations have not seemed like revamping so much as they resembled a planned metamorphosis, although such was certainly not the case. It was just that whenever he was changed, the right people with the right ideas were doing the changing.

Created by Jack Kirby, Warlock was originally a being known only as **Him** and the chronicle of his creation appeared in **Fantastic Four** #66 and 67 [with a brief beginning of the story in #65]. Alicia Masters is kidnapped, albeit non-violently, by a group of recluse scientists who have her transported to a remote structure they call the Citadel of Science. There the scientists have created a new life form intended as the first of a perfect race of human beings. But when the being reached adulthood it escaped from its life-cell tank and began running amok in one section of the citadel and radiating a power so blinding that no one could see him. This is where Alicia Masters came in. Despite their vast resources of super-scientific hardware, they cannot pierce the power which the being radiates [Where does this power come from? They seem surprised that it exists.], and so they require Alicia to get close enough to the being, which they call Him, to touch it so that she might make a statue of its likeness. Being blind, the power that radiates will not harm her eyes, but that has already been shown to be the least of the problems.

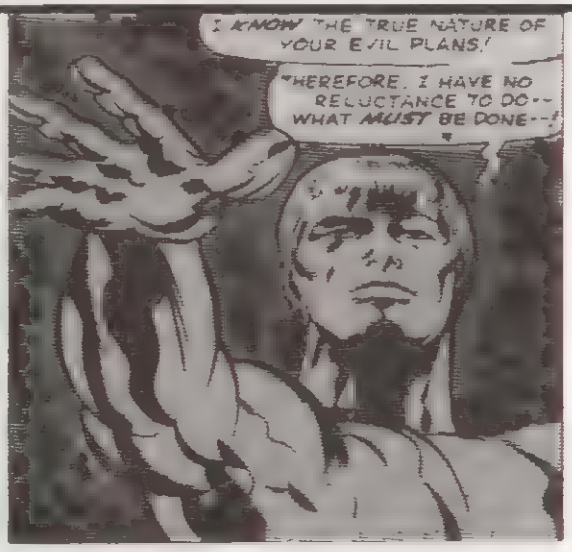
In F.F. #67 it's revealed the reason the being has incredible powers is that this new race of beings was intended to conquer mankind, but that the conquerors would be ruled by the scientists.

Meanwhile, the Fantastic Four manage to follow Alicia because Reed Richards used a heat image tracer to recreate the image of what happened in Alicia's apartment and then took a photo of the space warping bracelet the scientist wore who took her and duplicated it from the circuits he could see in the photo. Of course.

Just as the Fantastic Four invade the citadel, Alicia comes upon Him who is inside a strange cocoon, undergoing his final metamorphosis. Alcia understands his peaceful nature and that Him understands that those who created him intended to use him for their own ends. He allows Alicia to escape with the F.F. who pass back through the space warp grid just before Him appears to the scientists. Recognizing their evil plans, he destroys them and their mammoth citadel and then departs Earth. His form is different from the Warlock he would be known as years later as he is a god-like being with golden skin and short hair and his face has the neutral features of some Greek adonis. Him vanishes into space and thus his brief saga began and ended. He didn't seem like anything special at the time and came at the end of Kirby's long creative period in the F.F., where he

was introducing major new characters every couple issues. The fact that he was created by Kirby and used by Kirby until his metamorphosis into Warlock is often overlooked in light of the transformations made by Roy Thomas and later Jim Starlin.

Almost two years later, Him returned with surprising suddenness in **Thor**. **Thor** #164 ended with a climatic struggle and just as we thought everything was tied up, the final three panels show a strange biological speciment beginning to burst from a cocoon.




**Thor** #165 presented Thor and his comrades, Sif and Balder, entering the Advanced Science Research Center in New York to investigate something which Pluto had described in fearsome terms and insisted he had to destroy before he could establish dominion over Earth. Thor defeats Pluto but then enters the building to learn what fearsome being resided there.

Just then Him bursts from his cocoon and emerges from the laboratory. In F.F. #67 we had only a small two panel glimps of Him but here we see and learn more about Him. It seems that he wound up on Earth again because he accidentally stumbled onto some activity in space taking place due to some studies being performed by The Watcher [one of Kirby's most interesting creations and who first appeared in **Fantastic Four** #13]. The Watcher realizes he almost harmed this being and detecting that it originated on Earth, he sends it back there, much to Him's surprise when he awakens from his protective cocoon much later.

The simplicity of Him's character is revealed in these two issues as he tries to take Sif as his mate and must battle Thor. Him escapes with Sif to another planet and Thor pursues them there. In the midst of battle, Thor becomes possessed by the "warrior madness", finally driving Him off who escapes into space in his cocoon. Whether Him learned anything by this encounter we're left to conjecture.

It would be three years before Him was seen again, and this time it would be to better purpose. In **Marvel Premiere** #1 [April 1972], Roy Thomas transformed Him into the being he'd be known as ever after, Warlock, and the hands he used were those of the High Evolutionary [introduced in **Thor** #134 and 135]. I think it's only fitting that a Jack Kirby creation should bring about the alteration of another Jack Kirby creation.

Kirby had left Marvel by this time, so the new version had a new artist, Gil Kane, and his work matched perfectly this new interpretation of the character.

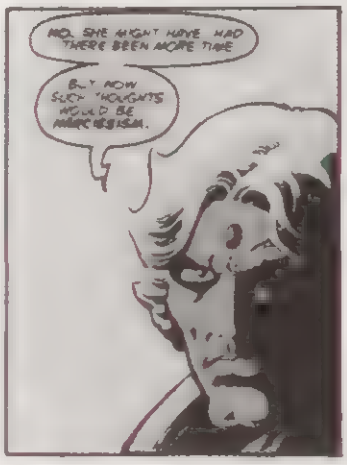
The High Evolutionary finds the cocoon of Him drifting in space and makes mental contact with it. He apprises Him of his plans to create a counter-Earth, one free of the killer instinct that has seemingly doomed mankind on the other world. But upon completion of his task, the High Evolutionary falls exhausted into a deep sleep and his plans for a peaceful world are undone by the Man-Beast, one of the High Evolutionary's early creations which failed to live up to his expectations. Too late the High the High Evolutionary knows that it has gone to wreck havoc on the new planet. He moves to destroy it but the being formerly known as Him spares his hand, stating that the people deserve better and that his feelings about mankind are not as shallow as they once were. The High Evolutionary agrees and transports the being down to the planet, infusing a strange emerald in his forehead to aid him against the awesome powers of the Man-Beast, explaining that once he walks on Counter-Earth, that men shall call him Warlock.

In **Marvel Premier** #2, we find that Warlock's transition to the planet was so violent that he's been stricken with amnesia (a handy plot device when nothing better comes to mind, I suppose). But he regains his memory, destroys some of the Man-Beast's minions and befriends a group of alienated teenagers. He also adopts the name Adam so that for the first time "Adam Warlock" is used. Three months later he had his own bi-monthly title.

Marvel often has a tendency to start off a title as though there is some great plan and grand design...and then seemingly lose interest or become distracted by something else. Their John Carter of Mars comic book is a prime example as it started off strong and then when the artistic team which had established its identity departed (for whatever reasons) they just assigned whoever was available that month and their mishandling was so obvious that even Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. complained.

Something similar happened with **The Power of Warlock** title. Here we had a superior being, Adam Warlock, on a world where superheroes never developed, but their parallel identities did exist (and were introduced in numbers 5 and 6).

In the first issue the war against the minions of the Man-Beast continues and we see a little more of Counter-Earth. The same team of Thomas and Kane are at the helm and all is right with the world. But +2, although it has a splendid Gil Kane cover, has layouts by John Buscema and finished art by Tom Sutton, who inked issue #1. John Buscema had already fallen into the boring artistic shorthand which demeaned the

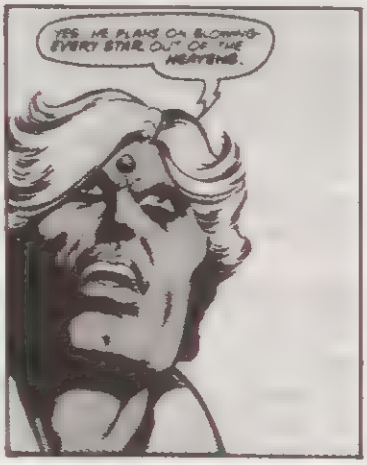



memory of the fine work he'd done on the **Silver Surfer** and on **The Avengers** when the Vision was introduced in #57 and 58 years before. But the art here wasn't too bad and certainly better than what would follow in the issues which killed this initial run.

Plotted by Roy Thomas and written by Mike Friedrich, it's just Warlock going back and forth with the Man-Beast. Numbers 3 and 4 deal with a minion of Man-Beast's named Triax (who is called Trax on the cover of #4). It's another long back and forth confrontation ending after Triax kills one of Warlock's friends and Warlock explodes into fury against Triax.

**Warlock** #5 introduces the Victor Von Doom of Counter-Earth, this time written by Ron Goulart but still drawn by Gil Kane (who returned to the book on #3), so some creative continuity remains. Von Doom is a dedicated scientist who wears the familiar body armor without the cape, etc. He joins forces with Warlock, especially when the President of the U.S. declares Adam a danger to society.

Issues 6, 7 and 8 were written by Mike Friedrich and drawn by Bob Brown and Tom Sutton. Sutton did the best he could on the inks but Bob Brown is no Gil Kane. The book seemed to be losing focus and direction, especially when it introduced Reed Richards as The Brute after the series had established that the Man-Beast had prevented **any** superheroes or super-villains from coming into being. But Warlock battles the Brute in numbers 6 and 7 as the Brute is controlled by some mysterious cloaked figure. He's saved from himself and turned back




into Reed Richards but at the cost of Von Doom's life. Number 8 is just one more story which ends with someone being—Surprise!—the Man-Beast. Thus ended the first saga.

It's not often that someone comes along, takes an already established character and makes it their own, but that's exactly what Jim Starlin did with Warlock. In **Strange Tales** #178 (February 1975), Starlin reintroduced Adam Warlock in a series that made all other versions pale in comparison and fell completely out of memory. Whereas Roy Thomas had seen a certain science fiction potential in the character (which under other hands quickly descended into

standard super-hero fare), Starlin saw a metaphysical potential in Warlock and proceeded to revive the character into an adventure which was as complex as it was beautifully illustrative. Marvel certainly recognized the strengths of it over previous versions as they recently began reprinting Warlock stories in special volumes available only in comic shops and these reprints begin with the series begun in **Strange Tales** #178. Jim Starlin has become totally identified with Warlock even though he did not change who the character was, merely what he experienced.

**Strange Tales** #179 introduced Pip the Troll, a new supporting character who would prove quite popular, and in fact Starlin has stated that if he ever revives anything from this highly praised series, it'll be Pip.

Throughout **Strange Tales** #178-181 and into the revival of his own magazine (which followed without missing a beat), Warlock is seeking to destroy the Universal Church of Truth and the being that spawned it, The Magus, another version of Adam Warlock. The criss-crossing realities becomes pretty complex as well as wondrous to behold. Into this boiling intrigue comes Thanos as well, a bizarre character introduced by Starlin when he was drawing the **Captain Marvel** comic in issues 28-33 (another Starlin epic), and which is made reference to **Warlock** #10.

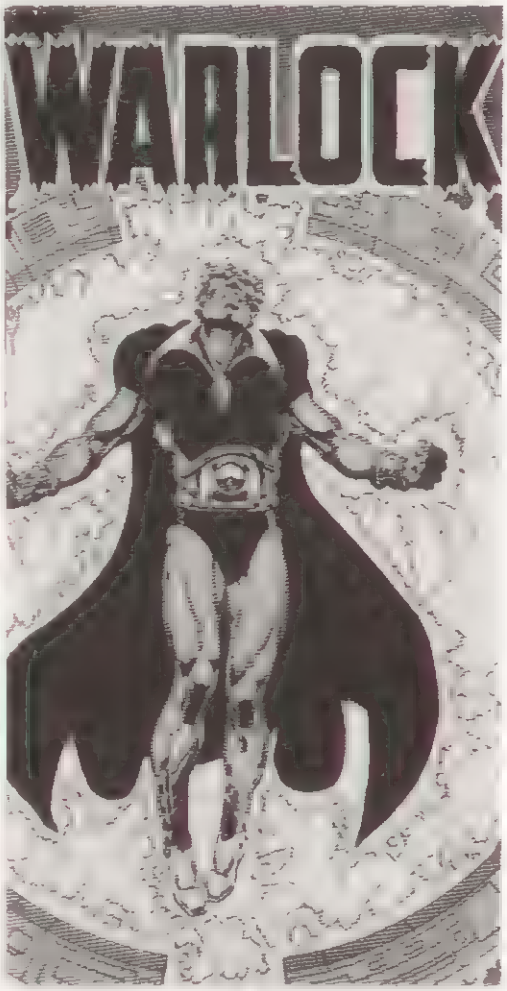
The conclusion of the Magus saga is in **Warlock** #11 in which the origin of the Magus also proves to be his conclusion. This series ranks as one of the supreme classics in comics as it shows what the form could really do.

Issue #12 is largely an interlude with Pip the troll while 13 and 14 are an odd story called "Starthief!" which has a completely unexpected conclusion. The final issue had Warlock searching for his destiny and even exploring his own soul gem. This was the final issue of the title, but Warlock had important things yet in store for him.

In **Marvel Team-up** #55 (March 1977) writer Bill Mantlo and artist John Byrne tied up a certain loose end from **Warlock** #15. The writer seemed to be trying to steer Warlock back from whence he'd come as at the end of the story Adam mentions in passing that he's on his way to Counter-Earth, but Starlin would have none of that as we'd soon see.

About six months later, **Avengers Annual** #7 and **Marvel Two-In-One Annual** #2 hit the stands in rapid succession. These two volumes, new book-length adventures written and drawn by Starlin and inked by Joe Rubinstein, wound up the Warlock saga in—what else—metaphysical fasion. There were battles and conflicts of almost every variety featuring almost every super-hero of any variety. Not only was Warlock finished up in this epic, but Thanos as well, and yet it wasn't a depressing conclusion to Warlock's career by any means. In fact, it was invigorating. Starlin doesn't believe in killing off characters in ordinary ways and even his concept of death is that of just another state of being on another level of existence.

Will Warlock ever return? Six years of resting in peace seems to indicate not, but then, unlike Captain Marvel, Starlin didn't have Warlock die of cancer. I expect, though, that if Starlin ever did revive Warlock, which seems unlikely what with his personal pursuits with characters of his own creation like **Dreadstar**, that Starlin would have to have something up his sleeve at least on the epic scale of the saga which polished Warlock off. It would be nice to see a series stay concluded while it was still at a high point and before it could be squandered at someone else's hands, but super-heroes and super-villains just have a tough time staying dead at Marvel.



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# Marv Wolfman's *TOMB OF DRACULA*s Examined

**by Kurt Busiek**

When Marvel's ***TOMB OF DRACULA*** series began in 1972, it had one major problem. It starred a vampire. Or, more properly, it starred **the** vampire; Dracula, the most famous bloodsucker in history. Now, considering that vampires are murderers, evil, damned souls, and generally nasty, it was difficult to reasonably star one in a comic book. The Comics Code, for example, specifically stated that evil must not go unpunished, and aside from that, a simple sense of morals required that the vampire could not triumph in his comic book the way Captain America and Iron Man continually triumphed in theirs. And yet, neither could he lose. The only really effective defeat for a vampire is death, and that certainly isn't an option in a continuing series. The only recourse, at first glance, is an interminable series of clashes between evil (Dracula) and good (us humans) with no clear winner; making stalemates, draws, and aborted victories the order of the day. With all this evident, it's difficult to imagine why Marvel would have decided to publish a Dracula series, but for some reason they did. ***TOMB OF DRACULA***, despite its difficult subject material, managed to last quite a while, and it behooves us to examine the series, to see how it made such an untenable concept work.

There is nothing spectacular about the first two issues. Written by Gerry Conway, they feature typical Dracula movie fare, which is to be expected, since the character has to be introduced in the manner that the audience is accustomed to. Still, these issues introduce two characters for a supporting cast (and though one doesn't last long, the other is present throughout ***TOMB***'s entire run), and set a pattern that would be followed with other supporting characters. Frank Drake, a descendant of Dracula's, and his "friend" Clifton Graves (also introduced is Frank's fiancee Jeannie, but she doesn't live out the story) come to Transylvania to claim Frank's inheritance. While the three of them explore Castle Dracula, Clifton frees Drac, and the fun begins. Clifton is basically a weasel, a conniving little rat who talked Frank into claiming his inheritance so he could steal it from him and make a fortune in the Transylvanian tourist trade. Frank, on the other hand, is slightly more complex. He's a dissipated young ex-millionnaire, who blew all his inheritance (except Castle Dracula) in three years, and is almost penniless and at loose ends at the start of the series. He's never worked in his life, and seems to not be good for much. Still, he exhibits the strength of personality to stand up to—and even fight—Dracula, even if he isn't very good at it. Also, in issue #2, as his fiancee Jeannie comes back as a vampire, he manages to kill her, to recognize the corruption within her and overcome his love for what she appears to be. Still, the characters are merely ***introduced***. Whether or not Conway could have surmounted the difficulties inherent in the material is unknown, since with issue #3, a new writer took over.

Archie Goodwin was the first to actually do anything with either spineless Clifton or heroic (on the surface) Frank. His brief tenure on ***TOMB*** began with Frank's attempted suicide, and Clifton's enthrallment by Dracula. Goodwin also introduced two more characters: Rachel Van Helsing, a descendant of the man who slew Dracula (you're beginning to see the pattern already, right?), and Taj, her mute Indian "servant," stop Frank from committing suicide over the horror he feels at having killed his fiancee (even if she was a vampire) and reveal that they are Vampire Hunters. This takes the magazine from the first, "vampire movie" story, and turns it into something that can conceivably be a series without immediately palling on the reader. Now, rather than Dracula running around killing all the beautiful young women in the neighborhood until somebody up and stakes him, the Vampire Hunters can stop him from killing all one locale's women, and then chase him somewhere else, and the whole thing can start over again. It's not much more palatable than the first formula, but it's something. (Note: These formulas I speak of never actually took over the book. Neither Goodwin nor Conway lasted more than two issues. I don't mean to impugn the reputation of either writer by intimating that he would have merely ground out

repetitive story after repetitive story; I'm only saying that they did not add anything to the book that made the series more than the difficult-to-write concept it was at the start.) Goodwin had the better credits for writing ***TOMB OF DRACULA***—he had written ***"Vampirella"*** for quite a while for Warren Publications, and had proven himself adept at creating inventive vampire plots. Vampirella, however, could be construed as a heroic figure (it's difficult, but possible). Count Dracula couldn't, not really. In any case, Goodwin stalled off boredom by the simple trick of introducing two new characters to which the reader could be introduced, which would take time. He also used ***TOMB*** to present a morality play, typical of the horror genre. Ilsa Strangway attempts to manipulate Dracula to regain her lost youth, and ends up damned for her trouble and no less old. Moral: Evil can only corrupt, stay away from it. This sort of story would become a staple for ***TOMB*** later on.

Gardner Fox finished up Goodwin's storyline, and added one more story to the ***"Dracula"*** canon. He introduced no new elements to solve the book's problems, no new characters, and as a result, though his two issues are inventively plotted, they're not very memorable.

Then came issue #7, which introduced ***TOMB***'s fourth writer, Marv Wolfman, who was to continue writing the series until its cancellation. Wolfman started his tenure with what should be by now a familiar trick—he introduced another descendant. This one was Quincy Harker, who was born in the last few pages of Bram Stoker's novel. Harker, aged and confined to a wheelchair, co-ordinated the hunt for Dracula' (and presumably, other vampires, since Dracula had been dead a few years when the series began). One began to think there were Vampire Hunters everywhere. In any case, Quincy (and his daughter Edith) made yet another new element to learn about, thus keeping up interest. And after the story that introduced the Harkers and brought all the Vampire Hunters together, Wolfman turned around and wrote them all out. They made a brief appearance in ***TOMB #9***, but had nothing to do with the story, which was a character piece about a young man who wanted to leave the small town he grew up in. Aside from focusing (for the first time) on someone other than Dracula and his would-be assassins, this issue infused Dracula himself with some real personality. Dracula stopped a pair of vampires from putting the bite on the young man's girlfriend, simply because he ***liked*** the boy. This was a divergence from the haughty, inhuman Drac of whom most of the audience was aware. It showed that Dracula was capable of the likes and dislikes (and presumably loves and fears) of a human being. This would become very important in later issues.

Quincy Harker, "chief" of the Vampire Hunters.

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Rachel Van Helsing and Frank Drake: "Wolfman accentuated characterization, making the 'why' of what the cast was doing of equal (or greater) importance than the 'what.' He presented the cast from many sides."

Wolfman seemed very aware of the problems with the Dracula series, because over his next ten or so issues, he guaranteed that at least in one way ***TOMB*** would be interesting. Due to Wolfman's innovative approaches and storytelling experiments, the reader had no idea what to expect in each new issue. Wolfman introduced yet another new character: Blade, the first Vampire Hunter who was looking for someone other than Dracula. Blade was after the vampire that killed his mother while he (Blade) was being born, and he ruthlessly killed any vampire he met. (Incidentally, all the Vampire Hunters had different methods of operation. Frank would try to punch out Dracula (who says ex-millionnaires have brains?), Rachel had a crossbow that fired wooden quarrels, Taj mostly tried to hold Drac down so Rachel could shoot him, Quincy had an anti-vampire arsenal built into his wheelchair (reminiscent of The Chief's "action chair"), and Blade had a bandolier of wooden knives that offed vampires with great frequency.) In the same issue that Blade premiered, Wolfman killed off Clifton Graves, who hadn't been good for much even as a slave of Dracula. Wolfman would thereafter systematically write out anyone who wasn't interesting, thus guaranteeing an engaging cast. He sent Taj back to India when it became apparent that there were more than enough Vampire Hunters, and a mute one didn't add much to the book other than clutter, and he even temporarily wrote Frank out when the character stagnated. Wolfman presented three more morality plays; the first featured a man who tried to use voodoo for revenge, the second centered aound a confused evangelist who tried to twist Dracula's hellborn attributes into a Christian message, and the third about a wrongfully-disinterred skeleton that sought eternal peace in its proper resting place. In the second of these Dracula dies—albeit temporarily—just to keep the series unpredictable. Dracula killed Quincy Harker's daughter, in order to keep the Vampire Hunters involved with things, and finally, Wolfman presented an issue of Dracula's Diary. In it, the Vampire Lord simply sits in his lair and writes in his journal, about three stories that happened to him over the hundreds of years he has existed. It was another way of making Dracula more human, as it allowed the reader to identify with Dracula, for a change, and see through his eyes. There was also a crossover with ***WEREWOLF BY NIGHT***, in the tradition of the old "Monster A meets Monster B" films.

But while all this was going on, Wolfman

'Quincy's role as behind-the-scenes coordinator, coupled with his handicap, was reminiscent of the "leader" character of one of Wolfman's favorite strips, The Chief (Niles Caulder) of the original Doom Patrol. This resemblance was further borne out by Dr. Sun, whom Wolfman admits was greatly inspired by The DP's arch-foe The Brain.

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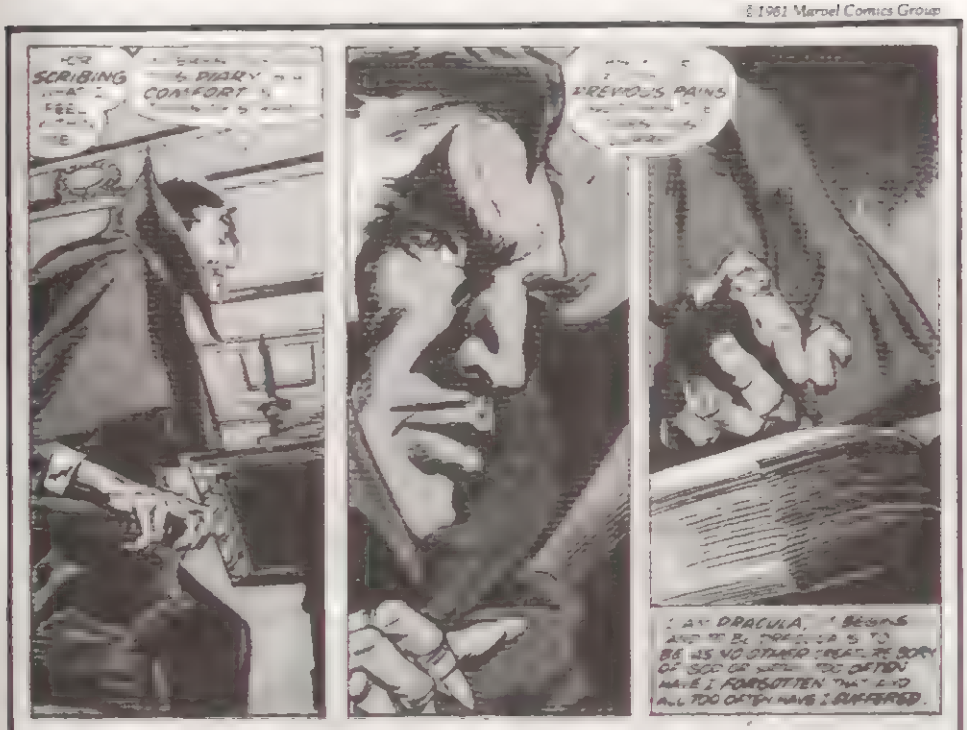


The Diary: "...a way of making Dracula more human."

had a sub-plot building in the background. A mysterious Dr. Sun was investigating vampires, and had even kidnapped one, and was training it to fight Dracula. While all the divergent, surprising elements were popping up to make each new issue interesting, the Vampire Hunters and this sub-plot kept a sense of continuity going. Slowly, the sub-plot took over the book, until finally Dr. Sun stood revealed (as a brain connected to a computer), and the confrontation took place. Immediately before this, Wolfman had had Dracula and Rachel Van Helsing stumble around lost in the Alps for a while, so that the readers became acquainted with Dracula's bravery, fortitude, and his intense will to "live." So when Sun unleashed his scientifically-augmented vampire on Dracula, the reader was firmly on Drac's side, cheering him on in this fight to the "death." Wolfman had taken one of the greatest symbols of evil in literature, and made him, if not a hero, at least sympathetic. And the way he performed this feat proved to be the basis for ***TOMB***'s continued appeal, and broke the barrier that had made a vampire comic seem unworkable. The magazine was not set up for the traditional Marvel "confrontation/resolution" type of story, in that any resolution had to be ultimately unsatisfying, because Dracula would still live, and he remained (let's face it) a bad guy. Wolfman's resolutions were consequently muted—ends to chapters rather than ends to stories. Since the major resolution could not happen, minor ones would end the issues, and there would always be an impetus to read the next issue—in which the big story went on, even if the little one was over. Then another story would be developed as this major story went on, a story that would not be resolved until it was large enough and complicated enough to draw the reader's attention away from the good/evil, Vampire Hunters/Dracula confrontation. The first Dr. Sun story, for example, escalated until it became a major force in the characters' destinies, over and above whatever else might concern them at the time. And to further divert attention from the plot, and get the reader involved with something other than Dracula's evil, Wolfman accentuated characterization, making the "why" of what the cast was doing of equal (or greater) importance than the "what." He presented the cast from many sides—how they saw themselves, how those they were fighting saw them, how they saw each other...any new viewpoint from which we could possibly learn more about the characters would be an excuse to drop everything and work on character.

Lilith, Dracula's daughter, faces her father:
"...whenever he wanted to, Wolfman could (at least temporarily) make Dracula the hero of the story...All these complex maneuverings simply made it possible to...explore other things."

And it worked! **Especially** with Dracula himself. He became an aristocrat, a warrior, a scholar, and above all, a man. It's hard to consider someone a soulless monster once you get to know them, and Wolfman let us get to know Dracula plenty well. So whenever he wanted to, Wolfman could (at least temporarily) make Dracula the hero of the story, by setting him up against something that was more of a monster (not more evil, but less familiar, and thus easier to hate) than Drac himself. This is not to say that Dracula's evil became unimportant. All these complex maneuverings simply made it possible for Wolfman to cloud or overshadow it for a while in order to explore other things, and thus keep the series intriguing. The menace inherent in the Dracula character is so strong that it's impossible to keep it hidden long—especially since Drac has a startling tendency to turn around and attack an innocent bystander just when you've been applauding his moral sense.

After the Dr. Sun situation was resolved, Wolfman returned to his quick genre-switching while he set up the next epic. An authentic Russian vampire legend gave way to gothic horror-romance with Drac as the hero. Then, while Wolfman wrote out Taj and Frank (sending them to India and South America respectively), he introduced another character to keep us on our toes. This new cast member was an interesting character type, as well as an exponent for further exploration of the vampire curse, because while the newcomer

GO NOW OR SO HELP ME... YOU'LL FEEL MY WRATH AS YOU NEVER HAVE BEFORE
LILITH! THEN IT IS YOU!
SHE STANDS TALL AND PROUD, DRESSED IN EBONY. HER LONG BLACK TRESSES SILHOUETTE A PALE ASHEN FACE

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I REALLY DON'T THINK THAT'S THE CASE HERE, AURORA.
THIS IS THE REAL McCOY!
HE'S CUTE. I COULD REALLY LEARN TO DIG HIM. YOU THINK HE'LL LIKE ME?
I DOUBT IT. AURORA, VAMPIRES ARE DEAD-- PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.
THAT'S NOT A NICE THING TO SAY, HAROLD--ESPECIALLY ABOUT SOMEONE AS CUTE AS HIM.
HAROLD! LISTEN! I THINK HE'S TRYING TO SAY SOMETHING.
SHHHH! LET ME HEAR HIM!
BLOOD MUST HAVE BLOOD..

Harold and Aurora: "...they were so alien to the *TOMB* status quo...that the reader could really feel for them."

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Hannibal King was a private investigator, and also on the trail of the same vampire Blade was after, he was also a vampire himself—a good vampire, who had never given in to curse, never killed to get his blood supply. He provided a fascinating counterpoint to both Blade and Dracula, since he proved that for all Dracula's nobility and class, he had succumbed to the curse's impetus toward callousness and evil, and King was still fighting it. Blade, of course, considered all vampires "scum," and only good for killing. What would he do when confronted with a vampire that fought for good? Many readers wrote in requesting a Blade/King team-up, and Wolfman probably chuckled gleefully over the complexity he was engendering in a "simple" monster comic. Dr. Sun entered the picture again (unrevealed), and another strong continuity thread began, to string together several otherwise unrelated stories. Dracula wrote some more in his diary, had a plot to infiltrate Parliament foiled, was nearly killed by Quincy Harker, and participated in a morality play about a fashion designer. All of these plots, though, while they kept things moving, seemed unimportant next to the fact that Dracula was progressively losing his vampiric powers, and that he didn't know why.

Wolfman frequently staged elaborate characteri- -ion scenes, in which someone's entire life was recounted in a few captions. These added to the illusion of depth in the series, suggesting vast vistas.

In the midst of all this, Wolfman devoted more space to characterization of the Vampire Hunters, which slowed the actual plot down even more. During the Quincy Harker confrontation, a flashback was included which revealed how Quincy had lost the use of his legs, and simultaneous "sub-plots" progressed featuring Taj and Frank, in an interesting "side-bar" system. Though these storylines were fit into the issues in traditional subplot style—cutting away from the main action for a brief scene elsewhere—they can't truly be considered sub-plots because they never really had any effect on the main story. Taj's story effectively ended his involvement with ***TOMB OF DRACULA*** (he was never seen again) by revealing and resolving his reasons for being a Vampire Hunter, and the South America "side-bar" solved Frank's characterization problem (he was a wimp) by having Brother Voodoo, of all people, teach him courage. The side-bar storylines weren't totally successful, though. The reader was kept waiting for something to happen connecting the "sub-plots" to the main story—especially in the issues that featured them on the cover—but that bridging never came. (Wolfman ***did*** use the side-bar system successfully later, but then he at least had the side-bar story take over the magazine eventually, even if it never did have much to do with Dracula.) Still, the technique was at least innovative, something ***TOMB*** was becoming known for, and the readers were likely to excuse its awkwardness because it showed that Wolfman was still trying new methods.

In any case, Drac flew to the U.S. (in a story entirely narrated by eyewitnesses—another innovation), the Hunters followed him (even Frank, who got unceremoniously dumped in Boston's Logan Airport by Brother Voodoo), and the stage was set for the final showdown—or almost set, anyway. Dracula still had to assume the hero's role in his series, so the readership would be on ***his*** side for the finale. Towards that end, Wolfman played up Sun's power over Dracula (since Sun was contemptuously toying with Drac, we tended to side with the underdog), introduced two more characters (whom I'll get to shortly), and even utilized Dracula's ***stature*** as a legendary evil to sway the audience to Drac's side. He simply had Dracula killed by Juno, a henchman of Dr. Sun's whom we'd never seen before. He had no special weapons that made him superior to the Vampire Hunters (he had a gimmick—a silver spike on one arm—but then all the Hunters had gimmicks) who had, after all, been hunting Drac for years. To have a rather uninteresting newcomer kill the star villain off just didn't seem fair. So in order for the story to be equal to the Dracula legend, Dracula ***had*** to come back and fight Dr. Sun. It was only right. Topping this off was the fact that it was the Vampire Hunters themselves, helpless to stop Sun's plans of world domination, who resurrected Drac. The situation positively reeked of moral ambiguity. Dracula faced Dr. Sun and was triumphant. No wonder ***PARENTS' MAGAZINE*** considered ***TOMB OF DRACULA*** one of the most potentially-harmful-to-children comic books available. The audience was cheering vampires!

Harmful or not, ***TOMB*** was still making strides in technique to keep the vampire concept interesting and saleable. The two new characters introduced in the Dr. Sun story typified this (if anything can be said to typify diversity). Harold H. Harold and Aurora Rabinowitz brought a touch of comedy to the series, and, though comedy is hardly unknown in comic books, it was certainly something new for a horror comic. The effect of these two bizarrely humorous characters was even more of a jolt than Juno's murder of Dracula. Harold's and Aurora's comedy both undercut ***and*** heightened the gloomy, tragic nature of ***TOMB***'s mood. The Vampire Hunters were so grim and purposeful that to die for their cause would be a fitting end (as indeed, it was, when Quincy eventually died). But Harold and Aurora were different—they were so alien to the ***TOMB*** status quo, so helpless, that the reader could really fear for them. Harold wrote schlock horror stories for an exploitation rag called ***TRUE VAMPIRE STORIES***; and was the typical shnook—he lacked money, good looks, manly physique, ability; even the editor of ***TRUE VAMPIRE STORIES*** thought his writing stunk. And yet, Harold faced the world with a sort of ineffable, schleppy charm. Totally aware of his incapabilities (except for his lack of writing skill), he goes through life as best he can, simply because there's nothing else to do. Aurora, the girl of Harold's dreams, was the secretary for ***TRUE***

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REQUIEM FOR A VAMPIRE!
THE STORM RAGES ON AND ON, DOMINI, AND EVEN I HAVE DIFFICULTY MOVING THROUGH THE TURBULENCE.
PERHAPS I SHOULD PREPARE AN ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION SHOULD YOU NEED TO LEAVE OUR HOME
AFTER ALL, I MUST NOW ATTEND TO THE AFFAIRS OF MY DARK CHURCH
PLEASE MY HUSBAND, COME HERE...LOOK AT OUR CHILD
SO TELL ME THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BABY YOU HAVE EVER SEEN?

The family life of Dracula: "[Domini's] ambiguous nature is deepened by the fact that after she married Dracula, she truly came to love him, yet at the same time she keeps a faith in God."

***VAMPIRE STORIES***, and she was as vacuous as she was beautiful. Her favorite topic of conversation was perfume, or maybe lipstick. (She was "cosmetically aware.") These two were definitely not equipped to face Dracula. Whereas the Vampire Hunters attacked Drac every chance they got, Harold, upon meeting the Vampire Lord, tried to interview him. Aurora fell madly in love with Dracula. Worse, Aurora actively looked forward to her every chance of seeing Drac. It seemed to totally pass her by that each such meeting brought her dangerously close to death and damnation. To kill her off would be far worse than to kill, say, the noble but tainted Rachel. Aurora had a feeling of life and, yes, innocence that none of the Vampire Hunters could match: where their lives were full of crossbow bolts, crucifixes, and strategy, her existence revolved around dates, dresses and bubble bath—just as Harold was exclusively concerned with his bank balance and the elusiveness of the opposite sex. Silly though they were, Harold and Aurora led lives far closer to the audience's own lives than to those of the obsessed, globe-hopping Vampire Hunters. The "comic relief" characters put the threat Dracula embodied into terms the average reader could immediately grasp, which made the horror content of the book much more effective.

After a single-issue story told from the viewpoint of a newspaper reporter trying to write a Dracula expose, Wolfman began a twenty-seven issue storyline which would last the remainder of ***TOMB***'s run. It began in traditional fashion, with sub-plots imbedded in otherwise unrelated stories, but unlike previous plots, these featured Dracula and his plans, rather than another character's schemes against Dracula. So rather than slowly building up into a presence that affected Drac, these subplots were important to the book almost immediately, and indeed, took over the magazine (albeit temporarily) in the fourth issue of the series. It moved along rapidly for a ***TOMB OF DRACULA*** plot at the start: during a ***DR. STRANGE*** crossover, Dracula finds and moves into a deconsecrated church. During a Blade/Hannibal King story (the other side-bar story Wolfman did) Dracula finds a Satan cult and, masquerading as Satan, takes it over. During a morality play issue about pollution and big business, Dracula gets married. Then the plot takes up the whole book, for while the important element in the next issue is that Dracula's wife is (mystically) made pregnant by him, the bulk of the issue is *not* an unrelated conflict, but rather a character piece in which the father of the bride attempts to disrupt and destroy the Satan cult and reclaim his daughter. This was weird stuff, to say the least. For all the time Wolfman had spent in the past making his Dracula into a human being (damned but still human) with human reactions and emotions, he had nonetheless primarily presented Dracula as someone who ran around biting people on the neck and making occasional half-hearted attempts to rule the world. The interest and variation in these plots was provided by the Vampire Hunters and the "villains" (not counting Drac as a villain for a moment). But from the outset of the "Satan Cult" plot-line, the focus of ***TOMB*** was clearly on Dracula himself, and how he went about living this un-life of his. The origins of vampirism were explored (since Dracula was setting himself up as the new Dark Lord, thus putting himself in direct competition with Satan, from whom Dracula's evil springs) and God was brought into the story too, through the agency of a life-sized portrait of Christ hanging in Dracula's deconsecrated church. Two new characters had been introduced, both of them fitting well into the Heaven-and Hell aspects of the story-line. The first, Anton Lupeski, was leader of a Satan cult and planned to manipulate the cult, and Dracula, to give himself power (having seen the fate of others in ***TOMB*** who sought to manipulate evil to their own personal gain, we know already he's doomed to failure). Dracula's wife Domini, however, was a far more intriguing character. The name means "belonging to God," and we first saw her in a Satanic rite, being betrothed to the Dark Lord. Her ambiguous nature is deepened by the fact that after she married Dracula, she truly comes to love him, yet at the same time she keeps a faith in God (as evinced by her attachment to the Christ portrait).

Having introduced all these new and surprising elements in relatively short order, Wolfman slowed down the plot once more and for a simple reason: Domini is pregnant, and the next plot element of major importance was to be the birth of Dracula's son. There were one or two things which needed to happen before the birth, but not enough to fill nine months, so

Wolfman returned to the unrelated-stories-loosely-strung-together format he'd used before. In the six issues between the conception and the birth, Wolfman diverted the reader's attention from the fact that little is happening by having two character pieces (one about a female vampire who wants to be killed, the other about a madwoman who conjures up literary characters for company) and allowed the side-bar story about Hannibal King and Blade's hunt for the vampire that killed both Blade's mother and King himself to take over the magazine twice. Also, Lupeski's treachery and the aura of mystery surrounding the Christ portrait were highlighted in a story featuring The Silver Surfer, and Dracula fought an angel (whom he mistakes for a demon) and defeated him, though there were ominous portents given about the angel's return.

By the time of Dracula's son's birth, the magazine was abounding with religious overtones. As if it weren't enough that Dracula is trying to take over from Satan, is living in a church, and fights heaven-sent angels, add this to the list: Since vampires are impotent, the mystically induced conception of his son was an immaculate one, and the son is born in a manger on Christmas. The symbolism would be getting a little thick, if not for the fact that the continual reference to the Christ portrait led the readers to believe that there were forces at work big enough to merit it. By this time, Wolfman didn't really need to add anything more to generate reader interest; the readers were on the edges of their seats anyway. However, while simply writing God into a comic book *will* generate attention, it's a subject which has to be handled delicately to avoid offending your readers' sensibilities (and even more delicately to end up with a good story). And for all the apparent Godly interference in the lives and destinies of this comic book cast, there are only two bonafide Heavenly items in the storyline, and both are handled circumspectly. The portrait of Christ never does anything a normal picture wouldn't. The significance it is invested with by the characters, and by the writer's and artist's recurring focus on it, is *not* generated by Wolfman having Christ take a hand in the story, but through the various characters' beliefs and reactions to the portrait. It serves as a reminder more than anything else. The angel is appropriately mysterious—indeed, perhaps because of ***TOMB OF DRACULA***'s cancellation, he never does fulfill his ultimate purpose, nor are we told what part he was to play in the grand scheme of things. He simply *is*, as the Christ portrait *is*, and all of his actions seem appropriately angelic, so he is both dramatic and acceptable to wary Christians.

The symbolism begins to fold into itself after three issues that further the plot not at all (a novel by Harold H. Harold, a character piece about a continually reincarnated man, and a Blade story in which Dracula never even appears), when the son of Dracula (Janus) is killed through treachery and is reincarnated three days later, as the angel Dracula fought earlier. This was a bizarre parody of Christ's resurrection and the vampire legend (which is itself a bizarre parody of Christ). The Janus-angel character, merely by existing, points out the links between vampirism and Christianity, connecting Dracula with Christ as well as with Satan.

From that point on, ***TOMB OF DRACULA*** never returned to the unrelated-story format, since there was more than enough material and variety in the main story-line to carry the series for a long time. If ***TOMB*** hadn't been cancelled, it's difficult to imagine anything following a story of this magnitude (although Wolfman apparently had something planned, due both to the loose ends left concerning the Janus character, and also due to the reintroduction of Topaz in the next sequence). Dracula goes to Hell and is robbed of his vampiric powers as punishment for setting in motion events which threaten Satan's power, and Topaz (formerly of ***WEREWOLF BY NIGHT***) was also brought into the story, as the potential instrument of Satan's destruction. But Topaz's curious appearance and equally-curious disappearance (for all we know; she's still in Hell) went unnoticed amidst the latest major developments. How better to explore the roots of vampirism than to return to them? Dracula turned human is a fascinating study in character—he's the same arrogant warrior, and even without his supernatural powers his air of superiority does not leave him. But this Dracula, inevitably, must view both humanity and vampires from a different perspective than he has been doing over the past 500 years. In his quest to regain his vampiric powers, he learns the frustration the Vampire Hunters have been feeling as they fail time after time to defeat him. He is rejected first by his own daughter and then by the legion of vampires that inhabit Transylvania. He also learns the true lack of honor in his former subjects, as they try to kill him, and spurn him in favor of their new leader, Torgo.

After Dracula rejects his former "life" and prays to God for salvation, his powers are returned by Satan, who reveals that *this*, rather than the "humanizing," was Dracula's true punishment. He has been forced to go back on everything he believed, and grovel before a God he had sworn to oppose. Living with his own hypocrisy is his punishment. And again, Wolfman has given us a fascinating portrait of a character: a Hell-spawned being who has renounced Hell and accepted God. The depth and power of this story-line is so great that when, in the last two issues, Dracula regains control over the world's vampires, realizes that they are scum and not worth ruling, and is killed by a dying Quincy Harker, it all seems anticlimactic.

***TOMB OF DRACULA*** changed its format and became a black-and-white magazine, without the Vampire Hunters, without the continuity and depth of character Wolfman had brought to the color ***TOMB***—without the elements Wolfman had carefully crafted to make an untenable concept into a series. It's not surprising then, that even with the same creative team, the black-and-white ***TOMB OF DRACULA*** was not as notable a series as its predecessor—it was just another vampire comic. Throughout seventy issues, the color ***TOMB OF DRACULA*** stood, and still stands, as a dramatic statement that the concept of a "viable commercial series" is looser and wider than one might think, and if time is given to carefully consider how a series should best be treated, even the most unworkable of concepts can be made into a new model of success.

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[not counting such anomalies as the trial of The Hulk, **INCREDIBLE HULK #152-3** or the trial of The Falcon, **CAPTAIN AMERICA #188**]. For example, in the trial of The Leapfrog [**DAREDEVIL #27**], the Man Without Fear didn't show up to testify, partially because he was too busy as defense lawyer, Matt Murdock. I may well have forgotten some example—I trust the readers of **LOC** will enlighten me if I have. Of course not every DC hero feels bound to comply with such established procedures for criminal apprehension and punishment. The Reisher Spectre, for example, despite being officer of the law Jim Corrigan, never bothered with such trivialities. One has to wonder why Corrigan's superiors didn't throw him

WE'LL SUPPLY YOU WITH THE INFO WE HAVE ... AND YOU REPORT AT INTERVALS TO US!"
EXCELLENT, AGENT DUNCAN ... I'LL KEEP IN
PROGRESS."
"LET US HOPE WE HAVE BOTH REASONED CORRECTLY."
THIS MAY DEPEND THE SURVIVAL OF ALL HUMANITY.
AS SEEN IN X-92 "SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT" STRA
NEXT ISH: The ORIGIN of... CYCLOPS!
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From the *"Origins of The X-Men"* series (beginning in *X-MEN #38*), Professor Xavier and Agent Duncan. The early governmental connection between these two "...does suggest some sense of federal authority over The X-Men."

off the force, inasmuch as every time he was assigned to a case, he had to end up reporting that the suspects had vanished without a trace!

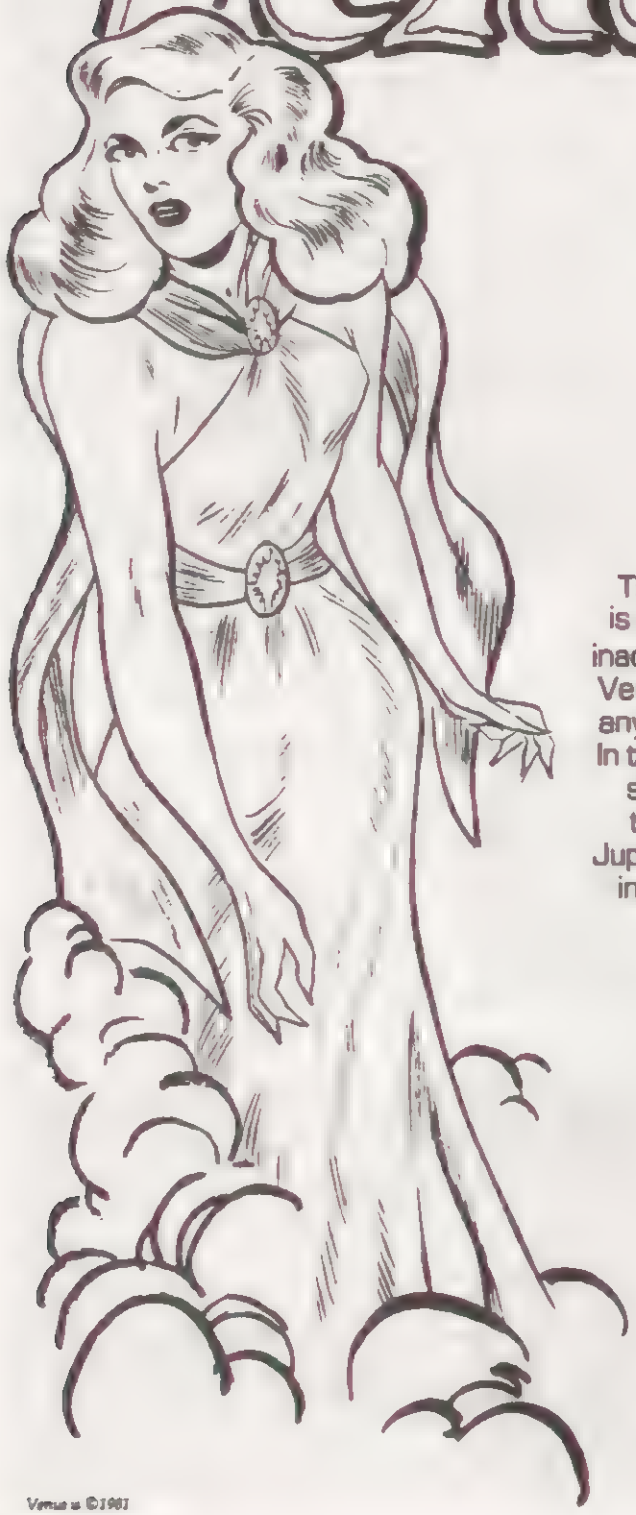
The notion of government-sponsored heroes gets taken a step farther with those heroes who are directly working for, or even were created by the government itself. This category includes the attempted S.H.I.E.L.D. Super-Agents, the super-beings [such as the new Golden Guardian] who were generated by Kirby's DNA Project, the various T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents, and, most recently, Canada's Alpha Right. The Canadian government is in a much easier legal position than the United States government to do such things. Canada, like Great Britain, has no written Bill of Rights—every question of individual rights is under the direct control of the legislature. Thus, if Prime Minister Trudeau could swing it in Parliament, Alpha Right could be given whatever authority he desired it to have. Certainly the rebuilding of Wolverine into an adamantium-clawed killing machine is going further than the US government ever did. It is not clear, since the subject hasn't been treated much in the comics, but I suspect that civil libertarians would get more apprehensive over the deliberate creation of "super-police" by the government than by the simple granting of recognition to super-beings who sprang up more or less on their own.

One area in which the Marvel and DC equivalents of the ACLU have apparently conceded the field to pragmatism is in regard to the treatment of super-villains. The examples of imprisonment of super-villains cited at the beginning of the article are only the tip of the iceberg. Both major universes seem to have some standard prisons designed for super-villains, most prominently Ryker's Island at Marvel and the Arkham Asylum at DC. But many villains still end up being locked away in extremely unorthodox fashion. So far as I know, the only story to touch on this question appeared in **JLA #169-170 "The Doomsday Decision."** In this Gerry Conway tale, five Leaguers were hauled before a special UN tribunal and charged with unlawfully depriving the super-being Ultraa of his rights without due process. The story makes it clear that the heroes are guilty as charged. However, Ultraa's attorney turns out to be a malevolent alien... and so the trial broke down into the inevitable fight scene and the question was never resolved.

Beyond the possible fun of just cataloguing all these examples of the legal status of super-heroing, there is a point to the discussion which is illustrated by the example of the JLA story. There is potential for interesting stories in an exploration of the real relationship between super-heroes and the law they allegedly defend. Some exploration of this has been done over the years, mainly in the interaction between various heroes and the actual police and prosecutors they run into. The series where the most recent work in this area has occurred is also the book where it is most natural: **DAREDEVIL**. The lawyer-hero has done considerable thinking about his attitude toward his foes, and his personal standards of law and justice, in the recent Bullseye and Gladiator subplots. I hope and expect that the unpublished DD/Punisher "drug" story touches on the legal and moral differences between a character who operates within the law and one who goes outside it. Just as there is no reason why comics writers could not extrapolate from real science to provide interesting and instructive plot devices, there is also no reason why comics should not extrapolate from the real world of legal restrictions and individual rights to the alternate reality of super-menaces and the super-vigilantes who deal with them.

# Venus

by Richard Howell



The goddess of love herself descended onto the world of mortals in the August of 1948. Being a goddess, she was granted her own magazine from the very first, in which she fought various malignant fiends and evil deities—all in the name of love

The word "fought" is used somewhat inaccurately, because Venus rarely **fought** anybody or anything. In those early issues, she **withstood**, then called upon Jupiter and friends to intercede for her.

Loki

A recurring antagonist was **Loki, God of Evil** [horned and fanged], who went on to bigger and better roles—thanks to family connections.

Venus quelled rebellions, stopped alien invasions, and interfered in peoples' love lives, for about twelve issues. Those issues could conceivably have been the inspiration for the modern **DOORWAY INTO NIGHTMARE** series.

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The Troll Queen from *VENUS #13*

The real fun began in issue #13, in which Venus' tediously cosmic [?] adventures were taken over by writer/artist **Bill Everett**, one of comics' all-time great artists, and one of the industry's champion eccentrics as well. The Goddess of Love's exploits got much weirder **much** faster.

Venus' super-powers, such as they were, vanished under Everett, but what his Venus lacked in supernatural abilities, he compensated for in grit. Venus no longer called on the gods for help, but instead took matters into her own hands, even if it meant downing a villain by a flying tackle.

ONE MOVE OUT OF YOU, HAMMOND, AND I'LL *SNIP* YOUR GIRLFRIEND RIGHT IN TWO!!!
OH, NO YOU WON'T, MR. WISE GUY! I'LL ROLL MYSELF INTO A SPITBALL AND FLY INTO YOUR EYE!

The day Venus became a paper doll, from *"The Day Venus Vanished."*

ALL RIGHT, YOU BIG, FAT, COP! I'VE NEVER GIVEN YOU A BUM STEER BEFORE, HAVE I? OKAY--SO NOW I'M OFF MY ROCKER! GO BACK TO YOUR OVERSTUFFED DESK CHAIR IN YOUR COZY LITTLE HEADQUARTERS, AND READ YOUR COMIC BOOKS! *I'LL HANDLE THIS MY OWN WAY!!!*

Venus tells off a disbelieving policeman in *VENUS #16.*

Everett's Venus also displayed a new personality. She took no guff from anyone, and gave quite a bit. [When her series ended, she probably struck her cane on the ground and became **Sgt. Fury.**]

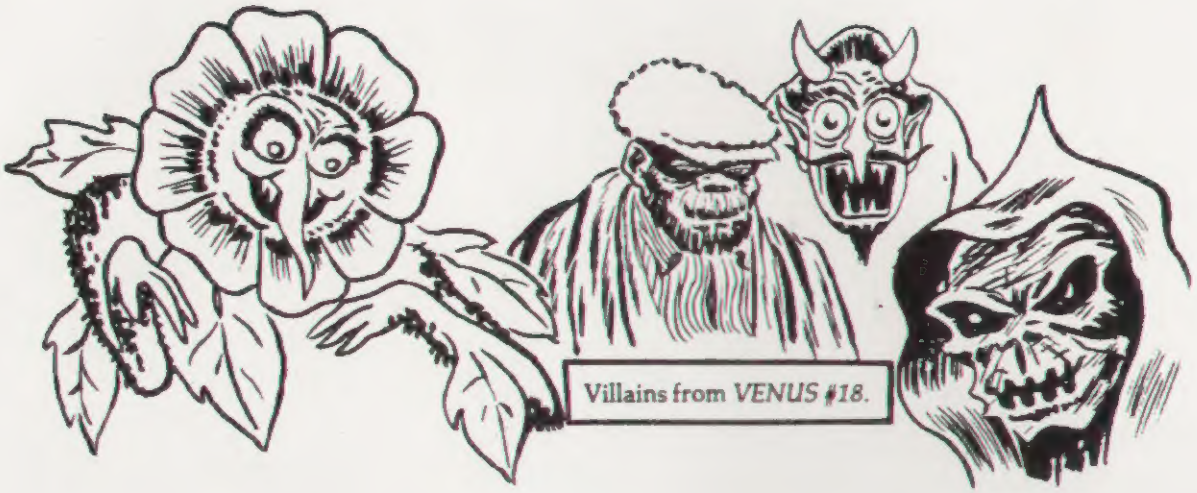
A "typical" **"Venus"** adventure is represented by **"Where Gargoyles Dwell"** in **VENUS #16**. The plot involves Venus' trip to the Greycar building, thirteenth floor. Although the elevator operator informs the demurely-clad goddess-in-mufti that there **is** no thirteenth floor, Venus walks up the stairs to her floor [yes, there was one] and finds broken chairs, windows, desks, and bodies. She also encounters Gara, king of the gargoyles who—along with the rest of his race of killer gargoyles—is posing as a common office gargoyle. Venus helps the sole living 13th floor-er escape [shattering a gargoyle or two with a fire axe in the process] and reports the incident to the police.

The police don't believe her, of course, and when they investigate, they find the building's floor numbers progress from #12 to #14—with **no #13!!** The sergeant asks Venus what she's been snorting, and she tells him off [see previous page]. That night, Venus, clad in a pure white evening gown—climbs up the elevator cables to floor #13. [Why she needed an evening gown to do so was not explained.] The oil-stained immortal discovered **Sylvia Corpo**, a deranged young woman who claimed to be Queen of the Gargoyles, and the person who gave life to the stone images [including that "double-crosser, Gara"].

There's no explanation of the process. Sylvia attempts to kill Venus. Gara and friends awaken and chase Sylvia down the hall, and they all plunge down the elevator shaft and die. When the police investigate the **next** time, they find a dead body, a bunch of broken gargoyles, Venus [safe], and Venus' purse and gloves wedged in between floors #12 and #14.

BUT GARA DIDN'T WANT ME TO BE HIS QUEEN--SO HE TRIED TO KILL ME! JUST AS I'M GOING TO KILL YOU NOW!
SO! YOU SHOULDN'T'VE TURNED YOUR BACK! I'VE GOT YOU NOW!!!
LOOK OUT— BEHIND YOU!

The story is, well, strange—roughly on the level of logic of an acid trip—full of vivid, fabulous imagery which seems to possess an **internal** logic, albeit a rather impenetrable one. At story's end, Venus, still covered with oil and once again unable to locate floor #13, enjoins the reader: "Can **you** explain it? I can't! Now g'wan home! I need some sleep!" [And a new evening gown, doubtless.]



Villains from *VENUS #18.*

Obviously, the villains in the **"Venus"** stories would have to be weird, too. In one issue alone (#18), Everett featured his heroine's battles with Old Joe and **"The Sealed Specters"** (a misanthropic handyman and the underground monsters to whom he had promised body-switches with normal humans), the killer flower people of **"The Mad Mountain"** (**no** explanation), and Neptunia, insane daughter of Neptune, an odd cross between Katharine Hepburn and The Sub-Mariner.

The Venus character returned in Marvel Comics, the heir to the Timely/Atlas characters, yet modern audiences still have not seen the iconoclastic goddess of love in her full 1950s glory. She appeared to be rather restrained in **SUB-MARINER #57** (in which she evidenced little of her old fire), and the "Venus" who appeared in **THE CHAMPIONS #1-3** seemed to have been based on the more traditional, pre-Everett version of the character.

It's not clear why today's heroine-mad comics writers and fans wouldn't want to revive a character so vibrant and unique—and keep her intact. Probably Bill Everett's trademarked "gonzo black humor with cheesecake" approach is beyond the grasp (or maybe comprehension) of many readers, and would certainly find some problems fitting into the Marvel Universe. Venus, though, remains an original—and a valuable part of comics' heritage.

Venus
GODDESS OF LOVE
CHEW ON SOME LOVE POWER, YA CREEP!
BONK!
HOLY MOLEY! SHE'S THROWING HEART-SHAPED BOXES OF VALENTINE CANDY!
Richard Howell '79

Artist's conception of a meeting between Everett's Venus and the Marvel Universe.

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